This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

NEDL TRANSFER
HN 345V /

Digitized by Google

478

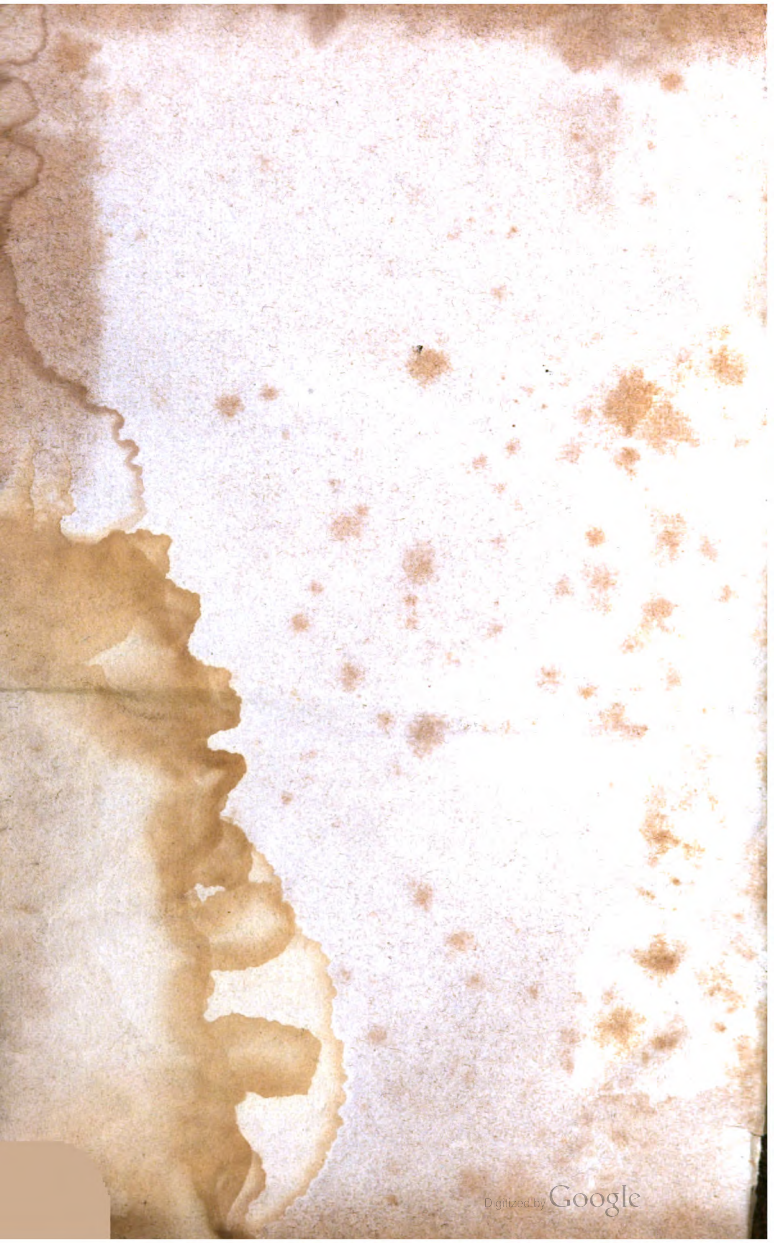
87

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google


Digitized by Google

IMMANUEL:

OR,

A DISCOVERY OF TRUE RELIGION,

AS

IT IMPORTS A LIVING PRINCIPLE IN THE

MINDS OF MEN:

To which are prefixed,

MEMOIRS OF THE AUTHOR,

AND A DISCOURSE CONCERNING COMMUNION WITH

GOD.

BY

SAMUEL SHAW, M. A.

FOURTH EDITION, REVISED AND CORRECTED.

VOL. I.

LEEDS:

PRINTED BY GEORGE WILSON,

HUNSLET-LANE.

1804.

Digitized by Google

KC 478

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
FROM THE LIBRARY OF
MRS. COOLIDGE S. ROBERTS
JUNE 28, 1938

Digitized by Google

MEMOIRS

OF THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

MR. Samuel Shaw, M. A. was born of religious parents at Repton, in Derbyshire, in the year 1635, and educated in the free school there, at that time the best in those parts of England. He went thence at fourteen years of age to St. John's College, in Cambridge. Upon the completion of his studies he removed to Tamworth, in Warwickshire, and was master of the free school there in 1656. From Tamworth he removed to Mosely, a small place in the borders of Worcestershire, being invited thither by Colonel Greavis, of that place, who had a great respect for Mr. Shaw, and shewed him great kindness. At his coming thither he was ordained by the Classical Presbytery, at Wirksworth, in Derbyshire; and in 1658, by the assistance of Mr.

Digitized by Google

Gervas Pigot, of Thrumpton, he obtained a presentation from the Protector to the Rectory of Long-Whatton, worth one hundred and fifty pounds per Ann. In June this year, 1658, he had full and peaceable possession of this place, and continued so to have till King Charles's return in 1660. Upon this event, fearing some disturbance might arise, he in the month of September, that year, obtained, without much difficulty, a fresh presentation under the great seal of England. But though his title was thus corroborated, yet Sir John Prettyman, made interest with the Lord Chancellor Hyde, and they fouud means to remove Mr. Shaw, in 1661, about a year before the act of uniformity came abroad. After this ejectment he never had any public living, and so was not properly turned out by the uniformity act, though he was silenced by it, for he could not satisfy himself to conform, notwithstanding he was afterwards offered his living without any other condition than that of reordination; but he used to say that he would not lie to God and man in declaring his presbyterian ordination invalid.

Upon Mr. Shaw's leaving Whatton he went to Cotes, a small village, near Loughborough, in the same county. During his residence here

Digitized by Google

his family was afflicted with the plague, who received the infection from some relations that came thither from London to avoid it. It was about harvest, 1665. About that time he preached in his family, and afterwards published that excellent useful book, called, *The Welcome to the Plague*, from *Amos* iv. 12. *Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.* He buried two children, two friends, and one servant, of that dreadful distemper; but he and his wife, who both had it, escaped with their lives, and looked after one another, and the rest of the family, which was a great mercy, for none durst come to his assistance, and he was in a manner shut up for about three months together. Mr. Shaw was forced not only to attend his sick, but to bury his dead himself in his own garden *.

* How sore an affliction Mr. Shaw must in these circumstances have undergone cannot be easily conceived, but great, amazingly great it must have been. But hear how the good man speaks in his preface to his piece intitled, *The welcome to the Plague*, which was drawn up and published upon the occasion. "Let me call upon men and angels, says he, to help me in celebrating the infinite and almighty grace and goodness of the eternal and blessed God,—who enabled me to *abide the day of his coming*, Mal. iii. 2. to stand when he appeared; and made me willing to suffer him to sit as a refiner of silver in my house;—who carried me above all murmurings against, I had almost

Digitized by Google

Towards the latter end of the year, 1666, he removed to Ashby de la Zouch, in the same county; and he was chosen to be the sole school-

said, all remembrance of those instruments that conveyed the infection to me;—who reconciled my heart to this disease, so that it seemed no more grievous or noisome than any other;—who subdued me, I had almost said, brought me in love with this passage of the divine will. I can remember (alas! that I can say little more but that I do remember) how my soul was overpowered, yea, and almost ravished with the goodness, holiness, and perfection of the will of God; and verily judged it my happiness and perfection, as well as my duty to comply cheerfully with it and be moulded into it;—who gave me a most powerful and quick sense of the plague of a carnal heart, self-will, and inordinate creature-loves, convincing me that those were infinitely worse than the plague in the flesh;—who wonderfully preserved me from the assaults of the devil; never let him loose so much as to try his strength upon my integrity, to drive me to a despondency, or to any uncharitable conclusions concerning my state;—who enabled me to converse with his love and mercy in the midst of his chastning; to see his shining and smiling face through this dark cloud; yea, kept up clear and steady persuasions in my soul that I was beloved of him, though afflicted by him;—who knew my soul in adversity, visited me when I was sick, and in prison, refreshed, strengthened, and comforted my inner man in a marvellous manner and measure, and made me appear to myself never less shut up, than when shut up. O would to God I might be never worse than when I was shut up of the plague! The not removing that affliction-frame I shall count a greater blessing, and a more proper mercy, than the removing that afflicted state—Who cleared up my interest in his Son, strengthened my evidences of his

Digitized by Google

master of the free school, in 1668. The revenue was then but small, and the school-buildings, the few there were, quite out of repair; but Mr.

love, and satisfied and assured my soul of its happy state more than at all times formerly. I had clearer and surer evidences of divine grace in that patient, self-denying, self-submitting frame of spirit, than in all the duties that ever I performed. The valley of tears brought me more sight of my God, and more insight into myself, than ever the valley of vision, all duties and ordinances had done. When the sun of righteousness arose upon my soul, and chased away all the mists and fogs of self-will, and creature-love, than also did all black and dismal fears, all gloomy doubting most sensibly flee before him.—Who supplied my family from compassionate friends with all things needful for food, physic, *&c.* The Lord return it sevenfold into their bosom!—Who maintained my health in the midst of sickness, in the midst of so great a death! I do not remember that either sorrow of mind, or sickness of body ever prevailed so much upon me, during three months seclusion, as to hinder me of my ordinary study, repast, devotions, or my necessary attendance upon my several infected rooms, and administring to the necessities of the sick. These ensuing Discourses were then composed, which do at least argue that, through grace, this mind was not altogether discompsed, nor body neither. Who preserved me and gave me not up to death! for I judge that I was personally visited with the plague, though not with the sickness.—Who hath given me a sincere and settled resolution, and vehement desire to live entirely upon, and to himself; which I account to be the only life of a soul, and only worthy to be called a living. Grant me this prayer, O most blessed and gracious God, for the sake of my only and dear Redeemer!

"Thou, O Lord God, who art witness to all my

Digitized by Google

Shaw by his diligence soon got the salary augmented, not only for himself, but all succeeding schoolmasters; and by his interest among gentlemen he collected money for the building of a good school, and school-house, and also a gallery for the convenience of the scholars in the church. Such a benefactor was he to that town! and such the lasting monuments of his praise! A difficulty occurred in this affair which was how to procure a license without subscription to such things as his conscience could not allow. But this difficulty was removed, for by means of the Lord Conway, he obtained from Archbishop Sheldon a license to teach school any where in his whole province, and this without so much as once seeing or waiting upon the Archbishop. A license

thoughts, and words, and works, knowest that in truth and soberness I publish these things to the world, not to advance the reputation of my own silly name, or to be admired of my fellow-creatures, but for the glory of thine holy name, to beget a good liking of so gracious a Creator in all thy poor creatures, who are prejudiced against thee, and thine holy service; and to strengthen the hearts of thy servants to a most firm and lasting adherence to thee, even in the greatest extremities; that thou mayest be admired in thy saints, and glorified for giving such power, and grace, and comfort unto men." And *O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men,* Ps. cvii. 8.

Digitized by Google

being also necessary from the Bishop of the Diocese, Mr. Shaw got a friend to make his application to Dr. Fuller, who was at that time Bishop of Lincoln. This friend putting Mr. Shaw's late book occasioned by the plague in his family, into the Bishop's hands, in order to satisfy him of the author's real worth, the Bishop was so pleased with the piety, peaceableness, humility, and learning discovered in the piece, that he gave Mr. Shaw a license upon such a subscription as his own sense dictated and inserted, and added, "That he was glad to have so worthy a man in his Diocese upon any terms." Mr. Shaw being thus settled in his school, his piety, learning, and temper soon raised its reputation, and encreased the number of scholars above any school in those parts; so that he always kept one, and for a great while two ushers to assist him, having often one hundred and sixty boys or more under his charge. In this station he did excellent service in the education of youth. Several Divines of the Church of England, and many gentlemen eminent in their several professions, were his scholars, and owed their school-learning to his instructions. He endeavoured to make the youth that were under his care in love with piety, and to principle

Digitized by Google

them in religion betimes by his good advice, and allure them to it by his good example.

Mr. Shaw was affable in his temper, and pleasant and facetious in his conversation. His method of teaching was winning and easy. He had great skill in finding out the tempers of his scholars, and adapting himself to them. He was of a peaceable disposition, and was frequently employed in reconciling differences, and was very successful in his endeavours. His charity was universal: he relieved the indigent, freely taught poor children where he discovered in them a disposition to learning, and afterwards procured them assistance to perfect their studies at the University. He was of a public and generous spirit, and was ready to encourage any good designs. He was given to hospitality. In principle he was very moderate. He kept a constant correspondence with the Vicar of the place, and though, when the liberty of the Dissenters was settled by act of parliament, he licensed his school for a place of religious worship, yet he so contrived his meetings as not to interfere with the public assemblies, nor lessen the congregation, preaching at noon between the sermons at church, and constantly attending there both parts of the day.

Digitized by Google

His book of Meditations was presented by him to Bishop Barlow, of Lincoln, who is said to be a great reader and judge of books, and a very considerable casuist. Upon the perusal of it the Bishop wrote Mr. Shaw a very respectful letter, in which are the following expressions *.

"*My Reverend Brother*,

"I have received yours, and this comes, with my love and respects, to bring my thanks for the rational and pious book you so kindly sent me.—Though my businesses are many, and my infirmities more, yet I have read all your book, and some parts of it more than once, with great satisfaction and benefit. For in your Meditations of your love of God and the world (I am neither afraid, nor unwilling to confess it, and make you my confessor) you have instructed me in several things which I knew not before, or at least considered not so seriously, and so often as I might and ought.—I shall pray for a blessing upon you

* See the letter at large in Dr. Calamy's *Account of the ejected Ministers*, page 432, &c.—N. B. This account of Mr. Shaw is extracted from that which the Doctor gives of him, and which the reader will find in the Doctor's Account, &c. page 426—436. and in his Continuation, page 592, 593.

Digitized by Google

and your studies; and your prayers are heartily desired by and for,

Your affectionate Friend and Brother,
"THOMAS LINCOLNE."

Mr. Shaw was of middle stature. His eye was sparkling. His conversation was witty, savoury, affable, and pertinent. But his greatest excellency lay in religious discourse, in praying, and preaching. One that knew him well has given this account of him. "I have known him, says he, spend many days and nights too in religious exercises, when the times were so dangerous that it would hazard an imprisonment for a person not to be drunk, or to be in a bawdy-house, or tavern, but to be worshipping God with five or six people like-minded with himself. I have sometimes been in Mr. Shaw's company for a whole night together, when we have been obliged to steal to the place in the dark, stop out the light, and stop in the voice, by clothing and fast closing the windows, till the first day-break down a chimney has given us notice to be gone. I bless God for such seasons. If some say it was needless to do so much; I reply, the life of our souls, and eternity, which only was minded there, require more. I say, I bless God for the remem-

Digitized by Google

brance of them, and for Mr. Shaw at them, whose melting words in prayer I can never forget. He had a most excellent faculty in speaking to God with reverence, humility, and an holy awe of his presence, filling his mouth with arguments. By his strength he had power with God; he wept and made supplication. He found him in Bethel (such were our assemblies) and there our God spake with us. I have heard Mr. Shaw for two or three hours together pour out prayer to God without tautology or vain repetition, with that vigour and fervour, and those holy words that imported faith and humble boldness, as have dissolved the whole company into tears, &c."

In short, a mixture of so much learning and humility, wit and judgment, piety and pleasantness, is rarely found in any, as met in Mr. Shaw. He lived beloved and died lamented, January 22, 1691, in the fifty-ninth year of his age.

> What happy prophet shall his mantle find,
> Heir to a double portion of his mind?
>
> DR. WATTS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

PREFACE.

AMONGST the many stupendous spectacles that are wont to surprise and amuse inquisitive minds, there seems to be nothing in the world of a sadder and more astonishing observation, than the small progress and propagation of the christian religion. This I call a sad observation, because religion is a matter of the most weighty and necessary importance, without which it is not possible for an immortal soul to be perfected and made happy: I call it astonishing, because the christian religion hath in itself such advantages of recommending itself to the minds of men, and contains in it such mighty engines to work them into an hearty compliance with it, and to captivate their reason unto itself, as no other religion in the world can with any face pretend to. I do earnestly, and I suppose rationally and scripturally hope that this *veritas magna*, those sacred oracles will yet more prevail, and that the founder of this most excellent religion, who was lifted up upon the cross, and is now exalted to his throne, will yet draw more men unto himself: and this, perhaps, is all the millennium that we can warrantably look for. But, in the mean time, it is too too evident, that the kingdom of satan doth more obtain in the world, than the gospel of Christ, either in the letter, or power of it. As to the former, if we will receive the probable conjecture of learned inquirers, we shall not find above one sixth part of the known world yet christianized, or giving so much as an external adoration to the crucified Jesus. As to the latter, I will not be so bold as to make any arithmetical conjectures, but judge it more necessary, and more becoming a charitable and chrirtian spirit, to

Digitized by Google

sit down in secret, and weep over that sad but true account given in the gospel, *Few are chosen,* Matt. xx. 26. and again, *Few there be that find it,* Matt. vii. 14. being grieved after the example of my compassionate Redeemer, *for the hardness of their hearts,* and praying with Joab, in another case, *The Lord make his people an hundred times so many more as they be!* 1 Chron. xxi. 3. It is besides my present purpose to inquire into the immediate causes of the non-propagation of the gospel in the former sense; only it is easy and obvious to guess, that few will enter in by *the way of the tree of life,* when the same is guarded with a *flaming sword!* And it were reasonable to hope, that if the minds of christians were more purged from a selfish bitterness, fierce animosity, and arbitrary sourness, and possessed with a more free, generous, benign, compassionate, condescending, candid, charitable, and Christ-like spirit, which would be indulgent toward such as are, for the present, under a less perfect dispensation, as our Saviour's was, *Luke* ix. 49, 50—54, 55. would not impose any thing harsh or unnecessary upon the sacred and inviolable consciences of men, but would allow and maintain that liberty to men, which is just and natural to them in matters of religion, and no way forfeited by them; then, I say, it might be reasonable to hope, that the innate power and virtue of the gospel would prove most victorious; Judaism, Mahometism, and Paganism, would melt away under its powerful influences, and satan himself *fall down as lightning* before it, as naturally as the eye-lids of the morning do chase away the blackness of the night, when once they are lifted up upon the earth. But my design is chiefly to examine the true and proper cause of the non-progress of the gospel, as to the power of it, and its inefficaciousness upon the hearts and consciences of those that do profess it. And now, in finding out the cause hereof, I shall content myself to be wise on this side heaven, leaving that daring course of searching the decrees of God, and rifling into the hidden rolls of eternity, to them who can digest the uncomfortable notion of a self-willed,

Digitized by Google

arbitrarious, and imperious deity: which I doubt is the most vulgar apprehension of God, men measuring him most grossly and unhappily by a self-standard. And as I dare not soar so high, so neither will I adventure to stoop so low, as to rake into particulars; which are differently assigned, according to the different humours and interests of them that do assign them; each party in the world being so exceedingly favourable to itself, as to be ready to say with David, *The earth, and all the inhabitants of it, are dissolved; I bear up the pillars of it*, Ps. lxxv. 3. ready to think that the very interest of religion in the world is involved in them and their persuasions and dogmas, and that the whole church is undone, if but an hair fall from their heads, if they be in the least injured or abridged; which is a piece of very great fondness, and indeed the more unpardonable, inasmuch as it destroys the design of the gospel, in confining and limiting the Holy One of Israel, and making God as topical, as he was when he dwealt no where upon earth but at the temple in Jerusalem.

Waving these extremes therefore, I conceive the true cause in general of the so little prevailing of true religion in the hearts and lives of men, is the false notion that men have of it, placing it there where indeed it is not, nor doth consist. That this must needs be a cause of the not prevailing of the gospel wherever it is found, I suppose every body will grant; and that it is almost every where to be found, will, I doubt, too evidently appear by that description of the true christian religion, which the most sacred author of it, the Lord Jesus Christ, made to the poor Samaritaness; which I have endeavoured briefly to explain, according to the tenor of the gospel, in this small treatise; which I first framed for private use, in a season when it was most behoveful for me to understand the utmost secrets of my own soul, and do the utmost service I was able towards the salvation of those that were under my roof; expecting every day to render up my own or their souls into the arms of our most merciful Redeemer, and to be

Digitized by Google

swallowed up in that eternal life, into which true religion daily springs up, and will at length, infallibly conduct the christian soul. This work thus undertaken, and in a great measure then carried on, I have since perfected, and do here present to the perusal of my dear country, having made it public for no private end; but, if it might be, to serve the interest of God's glory in the world; which I do verily reckon that I shall do, if, by his blessing, I may be instrumental to undeceive any soul mistaken in so high and concerning a matter as religion is, or any way to awaken and quicken any religious soul not sufficiently ravished with the unspeakable glory, nor cheerfully enough springing up into the full fruition of eternal life.

What a certain and undefeatable tendency true religion hath towards the eternal happiness and salvation of men's souls, will, I hope, evidently appear out of the body of this small treatise: but that is not all (though indeed that were enough to commend it to any rational soul, that is any whit free and ingenuous, and is not so perfectly debauched as to apostatise utterly from right reason;) for it is also the sincerest policy imaginable, and the most unerring expedient in the world, for the uniting and establishing of a divided and tottering kingdom or common-wealth: to demonstrate which was the very design of this preface. It is well known, O that it were but as well and effectually believed! that *godliness is profitable to all things,* and that it hath the promises and blessings of the *life that now is, and of that which is to come,* 1 Tim. iv. 8. that the right seeking of the kingdom of God and his righteousness, hath no less than all things annexed to it, *Matt.* vi. 33. How unmeasurable is the body and bulk of that blessedness, to which all the comforts of this life are to be as an appendix to a volume! But men are apt to shuffle off generals; therefore I will descend to instances, and shew in a few particulars, what a mighty influence religion in the power of it, would certainly have for the political happiness and flourishing state of a nation. Wherein I doubt not but to make appear,

Digitized by Google

that not religion, as some slanderously report, but indeed the want of it, is the immediate troubler of every nation, and individual society; yea, and soul too; according to that just saying of the holy apostle, *From whence come wars and fightings? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?* James iv. 1. Here let me desire one thing of the reader, and that is, to bear in his mind all along, where he finds the word religion, that I have principally a respect to the description given of it in the text, and that I mean thereby, "a divine principle implanted in the soul, springing up into everlasting life."

And now I should briefly touch those faults, both in governors towards their subjects, subjects towards their governors, and towards each other, which do destroy the peaceful state, and the sound and happy constitution of a body politic: and indeed I fear it will run me upon some inconvenience, if not confusion, to wave this method. But out of a pure desire to avoid whatever may be interpretable to ill-will, curiosity, presumption, or any other bad disposition, and that it may appear to any ingenuous eye, that I am more desirous to bind up than to rake into sores, I will expressly shew how religion would heal the distempers of any nation, without taking any more than an implicit notice of the distempers themselves.

First then, it is undoubtedly true that religion, deeply radicated in the nature of princes and governors, would most effectually qualify them for the most happy way of reigning. Every body knows well enough what an excellent euchrasy *, and lovely constitution the Jewish polity was in under the influences of holy David, wise Solomon, devout Hezekiah, zealous Josiah, and others of the same spirit; so that I need not spend myself in that inquiry, and so consequently not upon that argument. Now, there are many ways by which it is easy to conceive that religion would rectify and well-temper the spirit of princes.

This principle will verily constitute the most noble,

* A Greek word, implying a good temperature and condition, or state of the body.

Digitized by Google

heroical, and royal soul, inasmuch as it will not suffer men to find any unhallowed satisfaction in a divine authority, but will be springing up into a God like nature, as their greatest and most perfect glory. It will certainly correct and limit the over-eager affectation of unweildy greatness and unbounded dominion, by teaching them that the most honourable victory in the world is self-conquest, and that the propagation of the image and kingdom of God in their own souls is infinitely preferable to the advancement or enlargement of any temporal jurisdiction.

The same holy principle, being the most genuine offspring of divine love and benignity, will also polish their rough and over-severe natures, instruct them in the most sweet and obliging methods of government by assimilating them to the nature of God, who is infinitely abhorrent from all appearance of oppression, and hath most admirably provided that his servants should not be slaves, by making his service perfect freedom.

The pure and impartial nature of God cannot endure superstitious flatterers, or hypocritical professors; and the princes of the earth, that are regenerate into his image, will also estimate men according to God; I mean according to his example who loves nothing but the communications of himself, and according to their participation of his image, which is only amiable and advanceable in the world. What God rejected in his fire-offerings, religion will teach princes to disgust in the devotions, as they call them, of their courtiers; I mean not only the leaven of superstitious pride and dogged morosity, but also the honey of mercenary prostrations and fawning adulations.

In a word, This religious principle which makes God its pattern and end, springs from him, and is always springing up into him, would sovereignly heal the distempers of ruling by humour, self-interest, and arbitrariness, and teach men to seek the good of the public before self-gratifications. For so God rules the world; who, however some men slander him, I dare say, hath made nothing the duty of his crea-

Digitized by Google

ture but what is really the good of it: neither doth he give his people laws on purpose that he might shew his sovereignty in making them, or his justice in punishing the breach of them; much less doth he give them any such statutes, as which himself would as willingly they broke as kept, so he might but exact the penalty.

What I have briefly said concerning political governors, the judicious reader may view over again, and apply to the ecclesiastical. For I do verily reckon that if the hearts of these men were in that right religious temper and holy order which I have been speaking of, it would plentifully contribute towards the happy and blissful state of any kingdom. I will speak freely, let it light where it will, that principle that springs up into popular applause, secular greatness, worldly pomp and bravery, flesh-pleasing, or any kind of self-exaltation, which is manifold, is really contradistinct from that divine principle, that religious nature that springs up into everlasting life. And certainly, notwithstanding all the recriminations and self-justifications which are, on all hands, used to shuffle off the guilt, these governors must lay aside their sullen pride, as well as the people their proud sullenness, before the church of God be healed in its breaches, purged of Antichristianism, or can probably arrive at any sound constitution or perfect stature.

But I suppose religion will not have its full and desirable effect upon a nation, by healing the sickly heads of it, except it be like the holy oil poured upon the sacrificer's head, which ran down also upon the skirts of his garments, *Ps.* cxxxiii. 2. Therefore,

Secondly, It is indispensibly requisite for the thorough healing and right constituting of any political body, that the subjects therein be thus divinely principled. This will not fail to dispose them rightly towards their governors, and towards one another.

1. Towards their governors. There are many evil and perverse dispositions in subjects towards their rulers; all which religion is the most excellent expedient to rectify.

Digitized by Google

The first and fundamental distemper here seems to be a want of due reverence toward these vicegerents of God upon earth; which easily grows up into something positive, and becomes a secret wishing of evil to them. This fault, as light as some esteem it, was severely punished in Queen Michal, who despised her lord King David in her heart, and her barren womb went down to its sister the grave under great reproach, 2 *Sam.* vi. 16. *Prov.* xxx. 16. And if an ordinary hatred be so foully interpreted by the holy apostle, *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer,* 1 John iii. 15. surely disloyal and malignant dispositions towards governors must needs have a fouler face; and we may say, by a parity of reason, *Whosoever hateth his prince is a rebel and a regicide.* Now this distemper, as fundamental and epidemical as it is, the spirit of true religion will heal, and I think I may say that only: for I know nothing in the world that hath, nay, I know that nothing in the world hath that sovereignty and dominion over the dispositions and affections of the soul, as this principle thoroughly ingrafted in the soul, doth challenge to itself. This alone can frame the heart of man into that beautiful temper and complection of love and and loyalty, that he will not curse the king, no not in his conscience; no not though he were well assured that there were no winged messengers to tell the matter, *Eccles.* x. 20.

Another distemper in subjects, respective to their governors, is impatience of bearing a yoke; which is an evil so natural to the proud and imperious spirit of man, that I believe it were safe to affirm, that every irreligious subject could be well content to be a prince; however there may be many who, utterly despairing of such an event, may with the fox in the fable profess they care not for it. From this principle of pride and impatience of subjection, I suspect it is that the rigid Chiliasts do so scornfully declaim against, and so loudly decry the carnal ordinances of magistracy and ministry: not that they do verily seek the advancement of Christ's kingdom (which indeed every disorderly, tumultuous, proud, impatient soul doth, *ipso facto,* deny and des-

Digitized by Google

troy) but of themselves. To whom one mightly justly apply the censure which Pharaoh injuriously passes upon the children of Israel, with a little alteration, *Ye are proud, therefore ye say, Let us go, and do sacrifice to the Lord,* Exod. v. 17. This distemper the power of religion would excellently heal, by mortifying ambitious inclinations, and quieting the impatient turbulences of the fretful and envious soul, by fashioning the heart to a right humble frame and cheerful submission to every ordination of God. You will see in this treatise that a right religious soul, powerfully springing up into everlasting life hath no list nor leisure to attend to such poor attainments and sorry acquests, as the lording it over other men; been feelingly acquainted with a life far more excellent than the most princely, and being overpowed with a supreme and sovereign good, which charms all its inordinate ragings, and laying hold upon all its faculties, draws them forth by a pleasing violence, unto a most zealous pursuit of itself. A principle of humility makes men good subjects; and they that are indeed probationers for another world, may very well behave themselves with a noble disdain towards all the glories and preferments of this.

The last distemper that I shall name in subjects towards their governors is discontents about conceited misgovernment and male-administration; which commonly spring from an evil and sinister interpretation of the rulers actions, and are attended with an evil and tumultuous zeal for relaxation. Now this distemper, as great as it is and destructive to the well-being of a body politic, true religion would heal both root and branch. Were that noble part and branch of the christian religion, universal charity, rightly seated in the soul, it would not suffer the son of the bond-woman to inherit with it; it would cast out those ireful jealousies, sour suspicions, harsh surmises, and imbittered thoughts which lodge in unhallowed minds, and display itself in a most amicable sweetness and gentleness of dispositions, in fair glosses upon doubtful actions, friendly cen-

Digitized by Google

cures or none at all, kind extenuations of greater faults and covering of lesser; for this is the proper genius of this divine principle, to be very unbelieving of evil or easily entertaining of good reports, gladly interpreting all things to a good meaning that will possibly admit of such a construction; or if you will, in the apostle's phrase, *Charity is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil*, 1 Cor. xiii. 5.

And as charity doth cut up this root of discontents, so will faith allay and destroy these discontents themselves, which are about mis-government and ill-administration. This noble principle administers ease and satisfaction to the soul, if she happen to be provoked: for it will not suffer her long to stand gazing upon second causes, but carries her up in a seasonable contemplation to the supreme cause, without whom no disorder could ever befal the world; and there commands her to repose herself, in the bosom of infinite wisdom and grace, waiting for a comfortable issue. He may well be vexed indeed, that has so much reason as to observe the many monstrous disorders which are in the would, and not so much faith as to eye the inscrutable providence of a benign and all-wise God, who permitteth the same with respect to the most beautiful end and blessed order imaginable. Though faith abhors the blasphemy of laying blame upon God, yet it so fixes the soul upon him, and causes her so to eye his hand and end in all male-administrations of men, that she hath no leisure to fall out with men, or quarrel with instruments.

These discontents, I said, were frequently attended with an evil and seditious zeal for relaxation, discovering itself in secret treacherous conspiracies, and many times in boisterous and daring attempts. These are at the first sight so directly contrary to the character given of religious men, namely, *the quiet of the land*, Psalm xxxv. 20. and the genius of religion, which is wholly made up of *love, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, of mind, forbearance, forgiveness, charity, thankfulness, wisdom*, Gal. v. 22, 23. Col. iii. 12—16, that it is easy to conceive that

Digitized by Google

religion, in the power of it, would certainly heal this evil disease also. There are many pretenders to religion, whose complaint is still concerning oppression and persecution, their cry is all for liberty and deliverance; but to make it the more passable and plausible, they stile it the advancement of the kingdom of Christ. This pretence is so fair, but withal so deceitful, that I count it worth my time to speak a little more liberally to it. And here I do from the very bottom of my soul protest, that I account the advancement of the glory of God and the kingdom of Christ, to be the most desirable thing in the world; and that it is highly becoming the greatest spirits upon earth to employ their very utmost zeal and diligence to assist the accomplishment thereof: yea, so utterly do I abhor Irreligion and Atheism, that, as the apostle speaks (*Phil.* i. 18.) in somewhat a like case, I do verily rejoice that Christ is professed, though it be but pretended, and that truth is owned, though it be not owned in truth. I will further add, that the oppressing and obstructing of the external progress and propagation of the gospel is hated of Christ, and to be lamented of all true christians. Yea, I will further allow men a due sensibleness of their personal oppressions and injuries, and a natural warrantable desire to be redeemed from them. And now having thus purged myself, I entreat the christian reader patiently and without prejudice to suffer me to speak somewhat closely to this matter: yea, I do verily assure myself that I shall be accepted, or at least indulged by all free and ingenuous spirits, who are rightly acquainted with the genius of the christian religion, and do prefer truth before interest.

And, first, for the complaint that is mostly concerning oppression and persecution: certainly religion, if it did rightly prevail in our hearts, would very much heal this distemper, if not by a perfect silencing of these complaints, yet surely by putting them into another tune. I reckon that religion quite silences these complaints, when it engages the soul so entirely in serving the end of God in

Digitized by Google

afflictions, and in a right improvement of them for religious purposes, that she list not to spend herself in fruitless murmurings and unchristian indignations. As fire seizeth upon every thing that is combustible, and makes it fuel for itself, and a predominant humour in the body converts into its own substance whatever is convertible, and makes it nourishment to itself; so doubtless this spirit of burning, this divine principle, if it were rightly predominant in the soul, would nourish itself by all things that lie in its way, though they seem never so heterogenous and hard to be digested; and rather than want meat it would, with Samson, fetch it out of the very eater himself. But if religion should not utterly silence these complainings, by rendering the soul thus forgetful of the body, and regardless of its smart, in comparison of the happy advantage that may be made of it; yet, methinks, it should draw the main stream of these tears into another channel, and put these complaints into another tune. It is very natural to the religious soul to make God all things unto itself, to lay to heart the interest of truth and holiness more than any particular interest of its own; and to bewail the disservice done to God more than any self-incommodation. Must not he needs be a good subject to his prince, who can more heartily mourn that God's laws are not kept, than that he himself is kept under? that can be more grieved that men are cruel, than that they kill him; that can be more troubled because there are oppressions in the world, than because he himself is oppressed? such subjects religion alone can make.

As for the cry that is made for liberty and deliverance; I confess I do not easily apprehend what is more, or more naturally desirable than true liberty: yea, I believe there are many devout and religious souls that, from a right, noble, and generous principle, and out of a sincere respect to the author and end of their creation, are almost intemperately studious of it, do prefer it above all preferments, or any thing that may be properly called sensual, and would purchase it with any thing that they can possibly

Digitized by Google

part with. But yet that I may a little moderate if not *quite* stifle this cry, I must freely profess that I do apprehend too much of sensuality generally in it; because this liberty is commonly abstracted from the proper end of it, and desired merely as a naturally convenient good, and not under a right religious consideration. Self-love is the very heart and centre of the animal life; and doubtless this natural principle is as truly covetous of self-preservation, and freedom from all inconveniences, grievances, and confinements, as any religious principle can be. And therefore I may well allude to our Saviour's words, and say, *If you love and desire deliverance,* only under the notion of a natural good, *what do you more than others? Do not even the publicans the same?* Matt. v. 47. But were this divine principle rightly exercising its sovereignity in the soul, it would value all things, and all estates and conditions, only as they have a tendency to the advancement and nourishment of itself. With what an ordinary, not to say disdainful eye, would the religious soul look upon the fairest self-accommodations in the world; and be ready to say within itself, What is a mere abstract deliverance from afflictions worth? wherein is it naked freedom from afflictions to be accounted of? will this make me a blessed man? was not profane and impudent Ham delivered from the deluge of water, as well as his brethren? were not the filthy shameless daughters of Lot delivered from the deluge of fire, as well as their father? And yet we are so far from rising up and calling these people blessed, that the heart of every chaste and modset christian is ready to rise against the very mention of their names, when he remembers how both the one and the other, though in a different sense, discovered their father's nakedness. If we did really value ourselves by our souls, and our souls themselves by what they possess of the image of God, if we did rightly prefer the advancement of the divine life before the gratification of the animal, it is easy to conceive how we should prefer patience before prosperity, faith in God before the

Digitized by Google

favour of men, spiritual purity before temporal pleasures or preferments, humility before honour, the denial of ourselves before the approbation of others, the advancement of God's image before the advancement of our own names, an opportunity of exercising gracious dispositions before the exercising of any temporal power of secular authority; and, in a word, the displaying of the beauty, glory, and perfections of God, before health, wealth, liberty, livelihood, and life itself. We should certainly be more indifferently affected towards any condition, whether prosperity or adversity, and not be so fond of the one, nor weary of the other, if we did verily value them only by the tendency that they had to further religion, and advance the life of Christ in our souls. This would certainly make men more sincerely studious to read God's end in afflicting them, and less longing to see the end of their afflictions.

And as for treacheries, plottings, invasions, usurpations, rebellions, and that tumultuous zeal for relaxation, which this impatience of oppression, and fondness of deliverance do so often grow up into, I dare say there is nothing like religion, in the power of it, for the effectual healing of them. The true spirit of religion is not so weary of oppression, though it be by sinful men, as it is abhorrent from deliverance, if it be by sinful means. May I not be allowed to allude to the apostle and say, whereas there is amongst you this zeal, contention, and faction, *Are ye not carnal, and walk as men?* 1 Cor. iii. 3. Is not this the same which a mere natural man would do, strive and struggle, by right and by wrong, to redeem himself from whatsoever is grievous and galling to the interest of the flesh? Might it not be reasonably supposed that if religion did but display itself aright in the powerful actings of faith, hope and humility, it would quench this scalding zeal, and calm these tempestuous motions of the soul, and make men rather content to be delivered up to the adversary, though the flesh should by him be destroyed, so the spirit might be saved, and the divine life advanced in the way of the Lord. O how dear

Digitized by Google

and precious are the possession and practice of faith, patience, humility, and self-denial to a godly soul, in comparison of all the joys and toys, treasures, pleasures, ease and honour of the world, the safety and liberty of the flesh! How much more then, when these must be accomplished by wicked means, and purchased at the rate of God's displeasure? And because the kingdom of Christ is so often alledged to defend and patronize these strange fervors and frenzies, let me here briefly record to all that shall read these lines, the way and method of Christ himself in propagating his own kingdom. It will not be denied but that Christ was infinitely studious to promote his own kingdom in the best and most proper sense: but I no where read that he ever attempted it by force or fraud, by violent opposition or crafty insinuation. Nay, he reckoned that his kingdom was truly promoted when these tumultuous, impatient, imperious, proud lusts of men were mortified.—Nothing had been more easy with him, considering his miraculous power, infallible wisdom, and the mighty interest and party which he could by these have made for himself in the world, than to have raised his own kingdom upon the ruins of the Roman, and to have quite shuffled Cæsar out of the world: but indeed nothing more impossible, considering the perfect innocency and infinite sacredness of his temper, nor any thing more contradictions, considering the proper notion of his kingdom; which he professes not to be secular, and so not to be maintained by fighting: but if you would know in what sense he was a king, he himself seems to intimate it in his answer to Pilate, *Thou sayest that I am a king; to this end was I born, that I should bear witness unto the truth,* John xviii. 37. So then it seems wherever there are truth and holiness predominant, there is Christ really enthroned, and actually triumphant. Where religion doth vitally inform, animate, and actuate men's souls, it doth make them rightly to understand that the kingdom of Christ is not the thriving of parties, the strengthening of factions, the advancement of

Digitized by Google

any particular interest, though it seem to be of never so evangelical a complexion; no, nor yet the proselyting of the world to the profession of christianity, or of the christian world to the purer and more reformed profession of it, though these latter would be a great external honour to the person of Christ: but that it is most properly and happily propagated in the spirits of men; and that wherever there are faith, patience, humility, self-denial, contempt of this world, and pregnant hopes of a better, pure obedience to God, and sincere benignity to men, here and there is the kingdom of God, Christ regent, and the gospel in the power and triumph of it. And may not these things be, and be most conspicuously, in a persecuted condition of the church? That certainly was an high instance of the mighty power of the divine life in our blessed Saviour, which the apostle Peter records of him, who *when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatned not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously*, 1 Pet. ii. 23. The same divine principle dwelling plentifully in our souls, would instruct us to the same behaviour, according to the precept given by the same apostle, *Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing, &c.* 1 Pet. iii 1. How vainly do men dream that they serve the interest and advance the kingdom of Christ by fierce and raging endeavours to cast off every yoke that galls them, and kicking against every thorn that pricks them when indeed they serve the interest of the flesh, and do, under a fine cloak, gratify the mere animal life and sacrifice to self-love, which is as covetous of freedom from all retrenchments and confinements as religion itself can be.— It is said indeed that when the churches had rest they were *edified and multiplied*, Acts ix. 31. but when they suffer *according to the will of God*, they are then glorified: *for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon them*, 1 Pet. iv. 14. as the apostle Paul professes of himself in that most noble and heroical passage of his to the Corinthians; *Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me*, 2 Cor. xii. 9.

Digitized by Google

Secondly, Religion will not fail rightly to dispose the hearts of subjects towards one another; and that whether they be of the same way and judgment with themselves, or different. I dare not assert that it would make them all of the same way and mind; neither do I believe it would: yet I am more confident it would do more towards this catholic union, than all the laws and severities in the world can. Mutual forbearance and forgiveness, christian kindness and discreet condescension, are the most warrantable and most effectual method for introducing uniformity, and unanimity too, which is much better, into the church of Christ. But, however, religion would certainly give a right disposition, and teach men a right behaviour respective to each other, whether friends or dissenters.

This principle would teach men to love their friends and accomplices only *in the Lord*, as his members, not as their own partizans. Are not they strangely devoted to interest that will vindicate any thing in a partizan, which they will declaim against in a dissenter? And yet how is the sacred name of christian friendship reproached every where by reason of this partiality! How much better did true religion instruct the great apostle, *to know no man after the flesh*, 2 Cor. v. 16. no not Christ himself?

The same principle would not fail to cure the distempers of men respective to those that are of a different way and judgment from themselves; whether of protestants towards protestants, or protestants and papists one towards another. It would heal the distempered affections and behaviours of protestants towards protestants. Were men thoroughly baptised into the spirit of love and wisdom, which are so livelily portrayed by the apostles St. Paul and St. James, that one might well be enamoured of the very description: how certainly would all oppressions, law-suits, disputations about unprofitable and indeterminable points, either be suppressed or sanctified, either not be, or not be vexatious? Not to speak of the oppressions done by overreaching, stealing, lying, false witness-bearing, slanderous

Digitized by Google

detractions, envious suggestions, and malignant dissemination of doubtful suspicions, by which commonly poor men oppress the rich; all which true religion abhors. There is a great oppression that goes uncontroled in the world, which is, by the cruel engrossings and covetous insatiable tradings of richer men. What these are intentionally I will not say, but that they are really and eventually as great oppressions as those inhuman depopulations, and squeezing exactions, which are so much inveighed against, I doubt not. But, be they what they will, or be they excused how they will, I am confident that this divine principle that powerfully springs up into everlasting life, would mightily relieve the world in this respect; in that it would moderate men's desires of corruptible riches, forbid them to seek the things of this world any more or any otherwise than in consistency with, and subserviency to their primary and most diligent seeking of the kingdom of God; it would make men seek the wealth of others even as their own, and make private advantages stoop to the public good. I do verily believe, that if there were none but good men in England, there would be no poor men there. Civil laws may provide for the maintenance of the poor; but the law of divine love, a principle of religion, if it were universally obeyed, would make men so nobly regardless of earthly accommodations, that there would soon be room enough for all men to thrive into a sufficient stature; and then, being so grown, they would covet no more.

In law-suits, if there were any, men would seek the advancement of truth, and not of their own cause and interest distinct from it.

And O how excellently would it still the noise of axes and hammers about the temple of God! It would take men of from vain speculations and much eagerness about unnecessary opinions, by employing them in more substantial and important studies. The very being of religion in the soul would indeed decide a world of controversies, which the schools have long laboured in vain to determine.

Digitized by Google

For I reckon that these scholastical wars, fitly called Polemics, like those civil dissentions spoken of by the apostle James, chap. iv. 1. do, for the most part, spring from men's lusts that war in their members, such as pride, curiosity, lasciviency of wit, disobedience, and unsubduedness of understanding, and the like. I have observed with great grief, how the spirits of many men, I had almost said sects of men, run out wholly into disputes about ceremonies, *pro* and *con.* about church government, about what is orthodox and what is heterodox, about the true and the false church (which commonly they judge by something external, and indeed separable from the essence of a true church;) and hereabout are their zeal, their conference, and their very prayers themselves mostly bestowed. Who can doubt but that religion, in the power of it, would find men something else to do? yea, and if it could not perfectly determine these niceties, yet it would much heal our dissentions about them, and bring tears to quench the strange and unnatural heats that are amongst us, and cause such dreadful inflamations in our bowels.

But it may seem that there is such a fatal enmity and irreconcileable feud betwixt papists and protestants, that nothing, no not religion itself, can heal it. And truly if we suppose that it is religion that engages both parties in this enmity, I think it will prove incurable; but God forbid that this pure offspring of heaven should be so blasphemed! It is not religion, but indeed the want of it, that begets this implacable animosity, whatever is pretended. Cruel religion, bloody religion, selfish religion, envious and revengeful religion! Who can choose but cry out of the blasphemy of this contradiction at the very first hearing? Nay, I dare affirm it without hesitation, that the more religious any protestant or papist is, the more abhorrent he is from brutish savageness, wicked revenge, and devilish hatred. The church of Rome judges the reformed heretics are not fit to live; and why? not because they live not well, but because they cannot think and believe as they do. And to

Digitized by Google

this the genuine product of true religion? nothing less. For a desire of ruling men's consciences, and of subjecting the faith of others to themselves, is certainly compatible to a mere natural man, nay, to the devil himself, who is as lordly, cruel, and imperious as any other. The reformed churches, on the other hand are, I doubt, generally more offended at the papists for their persecutions of them, than for their real persecuting and crucifying Christ afresh by their sins; and so, consequently, do rather write and fight against them, than either pity or pray for them. I hope there are as many well-spirited christians in England, at least proportionably, as in any church upon earth; and yet I fear there are far more that could wish the papists out of this world, than that earnestly desire that they might be fitted for, and so counted worthy of a better. And doth this spring from a religious principle, think ye, or a selfish? Doth it not agree well to the animal life, and natural self, to be tender of its own interests and concernments, to wish well to its own safety, to defend itself from violence? May I not allude to our Saviour's words, and say, *If ye hate them that hate you, how can that be accounted religious? Do not even the publicans the same?* Matt. v. 46. I doubt we know not sufficiently what spirit we shall be of. The power of religion, rightly prevailing in the soul, would mould us into another kind of temper; it would teach us as well to love, and pity, and pray for papists, as to hate popery. I know the prophecy indeed, that the beast and the false prophet shall be cast alive into the lake burning with brimstone, and the remnant shall be slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, *Rev.* xix. 20. but, inasmuch as that sword is said to proceed *out of his mouth*, Rev. xix. 21. I would gladly interpret it of *the word of God*, Eph. vi. 17. which kills men unto salvation. However, let the interpretation of that text, and others of the like importance, be what it will, I reckon it very unsafe to turn all the prophecies and threatnings of God into prayers, lest haply we should be found to contribute to the damning

Digitized by Google

of men's souls. Yea, when all is said concerning the reprobating decrees of God, and his essential inflexible punitive justice, and all those texts that seem to speak of God's revenging himself with delight, are interpreted to the utmost harshness of meaning that the cruel wit of man can invent; yet it remains a sealed, and to me a sweet truth, *I have no pleasure in the death of him that died, saith the Lord God*, Ezek. xviii. 32. and again, *As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked*, Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

Wherefore, to wave all those dreadful glosses (that do rather describe the bitter and revengeful temper of man that makes them, than interpret the pure and perfect nature of God upon whom they are made) let us attend to that beautiful character that is every where given of religion, which is our highest concernment, in the person of Moses, of Paul, and of Christ Jesus himself, the author and exemplar of it; who by his incarnation, life, and death, abundantly demonstrated the infinite benignity and compassionate ordors of of his soul towards us, when we were worse than papists, as being out of a possibility of salvation without him; and *let that mind be in us, which was in him also*, Phil. ii. 5. Though it be not directly our Saviour's meaning in my text, yet I believe it is reductively, that this pure and divine principle, religion, springs up into everlasting life, not only our own, but other men's also. But, however religion is described, sure I am it is most unnatural to the religious soul that is regenerated into the pure spirit of piety, pity and universal charity, to be of a cruel, fierce, revengeful, damning disposition. And therefore whatever are the ranting and wrathful strains of some men's devotions, I beseech the reader to endeavour with me, that charity towards men's souls may go along in conjunction with zeal and piety towards God, when we present ourselves before the throne of his grace, and so, I am confident, it will if we pray sincerely to this purpose, namely, "That God would cause the wickedness of the wicked to come to an end, that he would

Digitized by Google

consume the Antichrist, but convert the Papist, and make the wonderers after the beast to become followers of the Lamb!" I doubt there are many that think they can never be too liberal in wishing ill to the papists, nay, they count it a notable argument of a good protestant, I had almost said an evidence of grace, to be very raging and invective against them. Alas? how miserably do we bewray ourselves in so doing, to be nothing less than what we pretend to by doing it. For are not we ourselves here antichristian, whilst we complain of their cruelties, our own souls, in the very act, boiling over with revengeful and scalding affections? If we do indeed abhor their cruelty, because it is contrary to the holy precepts of the gospel, and the true kingdom of Christ, we ought to be as jealous at the same time lest any thing like unto it should be found in ourselves: otherwise are we not carnal? For mere nature, as I have often said, will abhor any thing that is contrary to itself, and will not willingly suffer its delicate interest to be touched. The apostle tells us, that no man speaking by the *Spirit of Christ, calleth Christ accursed,* 1 Cor. xii. 3. but I doubt it is common to curse Antichrist, and yet by a spirit that is antichristian, I mean carnal, selfish, cruel, and uncharitable. For there is a spiritual Antichrist, or, if you will, in the apostle's phrase, a *spirit of Antichrist,* 1 John iv. 3. as well as a political Antichrist; and I doubt the former prevails most in the world, though it be the least discerned and banned. Men do by Antichrist as they do by the devil, defy him in words, but entertain him in their hearts, run away from the appearance of him, and, in the mean time, can be well enough content to be all that in very deed which the devil and Antichrist is. All this evidently appears to be for want of the true power and spirit of religion which I commend for so great a healer, even of our distempers.

Perhaps no papist will find in his heart to read this epistle written by a heretic; yet possibly too, some one or other may: therefore I will adventure briefly to prescribe this same medicinal divinity to them also; though perhaps I

Digitized by Google

might be excused upon other account, all that which I have hitherto said to distempered protestants being rightly enough, *mutatis mutandis*, applicable to them. But moreover, whereas they value their church, and the truth and rightness of it, by its universality and prosperity; the power of religion would make men to value themselves and their adherents, only by the divine impressions of piety and purity, and to account such only worthy of the glorious title of apostolical, and children of God, who are sincere followers of the apostles wherein they were followers of Christ, namely, *in true holiness and righteousness*. Are they industrious and zealous for the proselyting of the world, and spreading of their interest far and near? And are not all wicked men, yea, and the devil himself, so too? The fairest and most flourishing state of a church is nothing to God, and so consequently not to a godly soul, in comparison of those excellent divine beauties wherewith religion adorneth the world. But whereas the greatest complaint, and the most dreadful charge which the protestants bring against the papists, is their immanity and most unchristian cruelty, exercised against all whom they can but make a shift to esteem heretics; and they, on the other hand, alledge, that the interest of religion, and the catholic faith doth require it, and that they do not so properly murder men, as sacrifice them to the honour of God: it will be proper to spend a little time, at least, to clear religion of this blame; that as wisdom is at all times justified of, and in her children, so she may be sometimes justified by them, especially when the aspersions are so monstrous foul. And indeed she hath sufficiently instructed us how to justify her from all such imputations, having so fairly portrayed herself by the pen of the apostle James, both negatively and affirmatively. She is void of *strife, envyings, bitterness, and every evil work*; but she is *pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy*, James iii. 14.—17. This is the proper description of heavenly wisdom, or pure religion: and O that all christians would

Digitized by Google

estimate themselves to be wise according to their consonancy and conformity thereunto! then I would easily believe, that none would be papists in practice, whatever they might be in opinion. What, Sirs, is the God of the christian become like a devil, that he should delight in cruelty, and drink the blood of men? Is the butchering reasonable creatures that reasonable service which he requires? *Rom.* xii. 1. Is the living sacrifice of your own bodies turned into the dead sacrifice of other mens? It was wont to be said, *What communion hath Christ with Belial?* 2 Cor. vi. 15. And is *the Prince of Peace* now become very Satan, the author of enmity, malignity, confusion, and every evil work? Did he shed his blood for his enemies, to teach us that goodly lesson of shedding the blood of ours? Did he come *to seek and to save that which was lost*, Luke xix. 10. to set us an example that we might *seek to destroy*, and that only to repair our own losses? Be it so; that the protestant churches have apostatized from you: this, I hope, is not a greater crime than the apostasy of mankind from God, which yet he expiated, not with the blood of the apostates, but with his own. Religion was formerly a principle *springing up into eternal life*. How is the world changed, that it should now be a principle springing up into massacres, and temporal death? or is religion now become a principle springing up into secular power, worldly dominion, temporal greatness, and all manner of fleshly accommodations? This was of old the description of sensuality, and a heathen genius, *for after all these things do the Gentiles seek*, Matt. vi. 32. Are these so many mighty engines in the gospel to engage the hearts of men to believe, profess, and obey it, and must they all now give place to fire and sword? Are these the only gospel methods of winning men to the catholic faith? What! are we wiser for Christ, or more zealous than he himself was? Did he forbid fire from heaven, *Luke* ix. 55. and will you fetch it even from hell to consume dissenters? Did he sheath his sword that was drawn in his own defence, and set a dreadful seal upon it too, *All they that take the*

Digitized by Google

sword shall perish with the sword, Matt. xxvi. 52. and will you adventure to draw it in a way of revenge and persecution, and count it meritorious too, as if you should therefore never perish because you take it? Is it not written in your Bibles, as well as ours, that *no murderers shall enter into the kingdom of God?* Gal. v. 21. And do you think by murders to propogate this kingdom upon earth, and have a more abundant entrance into it yourselves hereafter? Can hell dwell with heaven? Shall bloody cruelty ever come to lodge in the bosom, or lie down in the sacred arms of eternal love? Be not deceived, Sirs, with a false heaven; but take this for an indubitable and self-evidencing aphorism of truth; No soul of man hath any more of heaven, no nor ever shall have, than he hath of God, and of his pure, placable, patient, benign, and gracious nature. And this is that everlasting life which a religious principle is always springing up into; so that it hereby appears plainly, that religion, in the power of it, would heal these feverish distempers also, and so restore a most excellent constitution, both personal and political.

It may seem possibly that I have toiled too much in these discoveries; and haply my pains may prove ungrateful to many: but may it please almighty God that they may prove vindicative of religion, restorative of the sickly and lapsed ecclesiastical or political state, yea, or medicinal and profitable to any single soul of man, I shall venture to estimate it against an age of pains. And if it should prove that by all this toil I have *caught nothing*, Luke v. 5. as the weary disciples complained of old, nevertheless being well assured that I have a word of God for my encouragement, I will *let down the net* once again, and so finish these epistolary pains with an earnest hortatory address to all that shall peruse them.

Let nothing satisfy your souls, christians, let nothing administer rest or settlement to your hearts, that is common to the natural man, or compatible to the mere animal life. There are a great many high strains of zeal and seem-

Digitized by Google

ing devotion, by which many men judge themselves to be some great ones, and concerning which they are ready to say, These things are the great power of God; which, if they be well looked into, will be found to grow upon no better root than natural self, and to spring from no higher principle than this animal life. It is impossible for me to give an exact catalogue of all these: many of them I have occasionally recorded in the latter end of the ensuing treatise; to which yet many more might be added, if I had a fair opportunity. But at present let me in general commend to you this description given by our Saviour of true religion, as the rule whereby I do earnestly entreat you faithfully to examine yourselves, your actions, affections, zeal, confidence, professions, performances. Let me speak freely; all pomp of worship, all speculative knowledge, though never so orthodox, is as dear to the animal life as the divine: and all external models of devotion, submiss confessions, devout hymns, pathetical prayers, raptures of joy, much zeal to reform indecencies in worship or superstitions, a fierce raging against the political Antichrist, do as well agree to a natural man as a spiritual, and may be as fairly acted over to see to, by a mere selfish carnal principle, as by that which is truly divine. When Diogenes trampled upon Plato's stately bed, saying *calco Platonis fastum*, it was answered him very sharply, *sed majore fastu*, he was prouder in treading upon it, than Plato was in lying upon it. I doubt it may be applied too truly to a great deal of that cynical and scornful zeal, that is in the world at this day; men declaim against the pride, and pomp, and grandeur of antichristian Prelates, with a pride no whit inferior to theirs whom they thus decry. However it is plain, that those things which are imitable by a sensual heart, and indeed performable by the mere magic of an exalted fancy, are not to be rested in by a sincere christian. Read over therefore I beseech you the fruits of the Spirit recorded by the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter, *Gal.* v. 22, *&c.* 2 *Peter*. i. 5, 6. and estimate yourselves by them: these things are utterly incompatible

Digitized by Google

to the mere animal man, all the natural men, and devils in the world cannot be humble, meek, self-denying, patient, charitable, lovers of God more than of themselves, or of their enemies as themselves.

Would you judge rightly of the goodness of any opinion? then value it by the tendency that is in it to advance the life of God: particularly thus judge of the Millenarian opinion, which begins to be so much hugged in the world: concerning which I will only say thus much at present, that, in the common notion of it, as it promises a state of much ease, liberty, power, prosperity, and freedom from all persecutions and oppressions, it is as grateful to the fleshly palate, and will be as gladly embraced by the mere animal man, as by the greatest saint upon earth. And therefore, supposing it to be true, yet I cannot but wonder how it comes to administer so much satisfaction, and afford such a marvellous relish to minds divinely principled, as may seem to taste in it. By this same tendency, to advance the divine life in your souls, judge also of all your enjoyments, riches, honours, liberties, friends, health, children, &c. and value them, if it be possible, only under this consideration. But to hasten to an end, I will endeavour to set on this general exhortation by two or three weighty considerations. First, It is utterly impossible that any speculation, opinion, profession, enjoyment, ornament, performance, or any other thing, but the transformation of the mind into the very image and nature of God, should ever be able to perfect our souls, as being most of them exterior, and all of them inferior to it. They cannot commend a man to God, who loves us, and whom we so far know and love, as we partake of his nature, and resemble him: this is the love of God, this is the worship of God, and this is really the soul's acquaintance with him, and nothing but this. Secondly, The advancement of the divine life is that which God mainly designs in the world. I need instance but two things: 1. The sending of his own Son into the world for this very end and purpose, *that he*

Digitized by Google

might take away our sins, says the apostle John, 1 *John* iii. 5, 8. and again, *that he might destroy the works of the devil*, and again, says the apostle Paul, *That he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*, Tit. ii. 14. 2. It appears that this is the grand design of God in the world, inasmuch as he doth not deliver his faithful servants out of their afflictions and tribulations: which he would not fail to do, did he not intend them a greater good thereby, and design to lead them on and raise them up to a higher life. Now what can more ennoble these souls of ours, than to live upon the same design with God himself?

And now, reader, I commend thee to the blessing of God, in the perusal of this small tract, which I have composed, and now exposed, under a sense of that common obligation that lies upon every person to be active in his sphere for the interest of the name and honour of God, and to render his life as useful as he may: more particularly, under a sense of my own deficiency in several accomplishments, whereby others are better fitted to serve their generation: and especially, under a sense of the peculiar engagement that lieth upon me, to dedicate my life entirely to his service, from whom I have so lately, and that so signally, received the same afresh: in imitation of whom, I hope thou wilt be indulgent towards my infirmities: to whom I heartily commend thee, and to the precious influences of his eternal Spirit, and rest,

Thy servant, in his work, and for his sake,

SAMUEL SHAW.

Digitized by Google

IMMANUEL:

OR,

A DISCOVERY OF TRUE RELIGION,

As it imports

A living Principle in the Minds of Men.

CHAP. I.

The occasion of the words of the text. The principal contents of it. The original of true religion. All souls the offspring of God, and a more especial portraicture of him; but godly souls yet more especially. God the author of religion from without, in several respects; God the author of it from within, enlightening the faculty. Religion something of God in the soul. A discovery of religious men by the affinity that they have to God. God alone to be acknowledged in all holy accomplishments. The original of sin from hence discovered.

JOHN IV. 14.

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life.

THIS chapter contains an excellent, profitable familiar discourse of the blessed Saviour of the world, into whose lips grace was poured, *Ps.* xlv. 2. and he ceased not to pour it out again. That which is said of the wise, *Prov.* xv. 7. is fully verified of wisdom itself, his lips dispersed

Digitized by Google

knowledge. A poor woman of Samaria comes to draw water, and our Saviour takes occasion from the water to instruct her in the great and excellent doctrines of the kingdom of heaven. O the admirable zeal for God, and compassion for souls, which dwell in that divine breast! and O the wonderful unsearchable counsels of an all-wise God! He ordains Saul's seeking of asses to be the means of his finding a kingdom upon earth; and this poor woman's seeking of water, to be an occasion of her finding the way to the kingdom of heaven. She comes to the well of Jacob, and, behold, she meets with the God of Jacob there. The occasion, passages, and issue of this discourse, would each afford many good and profitable observations: but I think none more than this verse that I have pitched upon; in which the mystery of gospel-grace is rarely unfolded, and true christian religion is excellently described. For so I understand our Saviour, not as speaking of faith, or knowledge, or any other particular grace, but of grace in general, of the holy Spirit of God; that is, the gifts and graces of it, of true godliness; or, if you will, of christian religion; for that word I shall choose to retain throughout my discourse, as being most intelligible and comprehensive.

In which words we find the true christian religion unfolded in the original, nature, properties, consequent, and end of it. The original of it is found in those words, *I shall give him;* the nature of it is described by *a well of water;* the properties of it will be found in the phrase of *springing up;* the consequent of it, that the man that is endowed with it *shall never thirst;* the end or perfection of it is *everlasting life.* Of all these, by God's assistance, in this order:

First, I begin at the original of it, as it seems meet I should; for indeed it is first found in the words, *The water that I shall give him.* And here the proposition that I shall go upon must be, 'That the true christian religion is of divine original.' All souls are indeed the offspring of God. Those noble faculties of understanding, and a will free from constraint, do more resemble the nature of God than all the

Digitized by Google

world besides. There is more of the glory, beauty, and brightness of God in a soul, than there is in the sun itself. The apostle allows it as a proper speech spoken in common of all men, *for we are also his offspring*, Acts xvii. 28. God hath derived more lively prints of himself, and his divine essence, upon a rational soul, than he hath upon the whole creation: so that the soul of man, even as to its constitution, doth declare and discover more of the nature of God, than all the other things that he hath made, whereof the Apostle speaks, *Rom.* i. 20. He that rightly converseth with his own soul, will get more acquaintance with God, than they that gaze continually upon the material heavens, or traverse the dark and utmost corners of the earth, or go down unto the sea in ships; the serious consideration of the little world will teach more of him than the great one could do: so that I doubt not to take the apostle's words concerning the word of God, and apply them to the nature of God, Rom. x. 6. *Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven*, to bring a discovery of God from thence? or, *who shall descend into the deep*, to fetch it up from thence? The nature and essence of God is nigh thee, even in thine own soul, excellently displayed in the constitution and frame, powers, and faculties thereof: God hath not made any creature so capable of receiving and reflecting his image and glory, as angels and men: which hath made me often to say, "That the vilest soul of man is much more beautiful and honourable than the most excellent body, than the very body of the sun at noon-day.' And, by the way, this may render sin odious and loathsome; because it hath defiled the fairest piece of God's workmanship in the world, and hath blurred the clearest copy which he had drawn of himself in the whole creation.

But though all rational souls be the children of God, yet all of them do not imitate their father; though their constitution do express much of the essence of God, yet their disposition doth express the image of the devil. But godly souls, who are *followers of God*, are indeed his *dear*

Digitized by Google

children, Eph. v. 1. Holy souls, who are endowed with a divine and God-like disposition, and do work the works of God, these are most truly and properly his offspring, *Matt.* v. 44, 45. And in this respect God's children are his *workmanship created unto good works*, Eph. ii. 10. Religion is of a divine original: God is the author and father of it, both from without and from within.

1. God is the author of it from without. When man had fallen from God by sin, and so had lost his way, and was become both unwilling and unable to return, God was pleased to set up that glorious light, his own Son, the Sun of Righteousness, in the world, that he might guide our feet into the way of peace, who is therefore called, *A light to lighten the Gentiles*, Luke ii. 32. and compared to a candle set upon a candlestic, *Mark* iv. 21. God of his infinite free grace, and over-flowing goodness, provided a Mediator, in and by whom these apostate souls might be reconciled, and re-united to himself; and *to as many as receive him, to them he giveth power to become the sons of God*, John i. 12.

Yet further, it pleased God in his infinite wisdom and mercy, to chalk out the way of life and peace in the holy scriptures, and therein to unlock the secrets of salvation to succeeding generations. Herein he hath plainly laid down the terms of the covenant of peace which was made in the Mediator, and given precepts and promises for the direction and encouragement of as many as will inquire into the same. These are the sacred oracles which give clear and certain answers to all that do consult them about their future state, *Rom.* iii. 2. Christ Jesus opened the way into the holiest of all, and the scriptures they come after and point it out unto us: he purchased life and immortality, and these bring it to light, 2 *Tim.* i 10.

And yet further, that these might not be mistaken or perverted to mens destruction, which were ordained for their salvation, which sometimes doth come to pass, 2 *Pet.* iii. 16. God hath been pleased to commit these records into the hands of his church, and therein to his ministers, whom he

Digitized by Google

hath appointed, called, qualified, instructed, for the opening, explaining, interpreting, and applying of them: so that they are called *scribes instructed unto the kingdom of God, and stewards of the mysteries, stewards over the household of God, to give unto every one his portion.* These apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, God hath given *for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ*, Eph. iv. 11, 12.

These things hath God done for us, from without us; he hath set up a light, chalked out our way, and appointed us guides. To which I might add the many incitements and motives which we call mercies or comfort of this life; and the many affrightments of judgments and afflictions which God hath added to the promises and threatnings of his word, to bring us into the way of life. But all these are too little, too weak of themselves to bring back a straggling soul, or to produce a living principle of true religion in it. Therefore,

2. God is the author of religion from within. He doth not only reveal himself and his Son to the soul, but in it; he doth not only make discoveries to it, but lively impressions upon it; he doth not only appoint, and point out the way of life, but breathes in the breath of life. He hath not only provided a Saviour, a Redeemer, but he also draws the soul unto him, *John*, vi. 44. He hath not only appointed pastors and teachers, but he himself impregnates their word, and clothes their doctrine with his own power, using their ministry as an instrument whereby to teach; so that the children of God are said to be *all taught of God*, John vi. 45. Ministers can only discover, and, as it were, enlighten the object; but God enlightens the faculty, he gives the seeing eye, and does actually enable it to discern. Therefore the work of converting a soul is still ascribed to God in scripture; he begets us again, 1 *Pet.* i. 3. he draws the soul, before it can run after him, *Cant.* i. 4. Christ apprehends the soul, lays powerful hold of it, *Phil.* iii. 12. God gives a heart of flesh, a new heart; he causes men to walk in his

Digitized by Google

statutes, *Ezek.* xxxvi. 26, 27. He puts his law into their inward parts, and writes it in their hearts, *Jer.* xxxi. 33. To which I might add many more quotations of the same value.

But yet, methinks, we are not come to a perfect discovery of religion's being the offspring of God in the minds of men. For it is God who enlighteneth the faculty as to the learning of all other things also; he teacheth the grammar and the rhetoric, as well as the divinity; he instructeth even the husbandman to discretion in his affairs of husbandry, and teaches him to plow, and sow, and thresh, *&c. Isa.* xxviii. 26. Not only the gift of divine knowledge, but indeed *every good gift cometh from the futher of lights*, James i. 17. God doth from within give that capacity, illumination of the faculty, ingenuity, whereby we comprehend the mysteries of nature, as well as of grace, *John* i. 9.

Therefore we may conceive of the original of religion in a more inward and spiritual manner still. It is not so much given of God, as itself is something of God in the soul; as the soul is not so properly said to give life, as to be the life of man. As the conjunction of the soul with the body is the life of the body, so verily the life of the soul stands in its conjunction with God by a spiritual union of will and affections. God doth not enlighten mens minds as the sun enlightens the world, by shining unto them, and round about them, but by shining into them, by enlightening the faculty, as I said before, yea, which seems to be somewhat more, by shining in their hearts, as the apostle phraseth it, 2 *Cor.* iv. 6. He sets up a candle, which is his own light within the soul; so that the soul sees God in his own light, and loves him with the love that he hath shed abroad in it; and religion is no other than a reflection of that divine image, life, and light, and love, which from God are stamped and imprinted upon the souls of true christians. God is said to enlighten the soul, but it is not as the sun enlightens, that you see; so he draws the soul too, but not *ab extra* only, as one man draweth another with a cord, as *Jupiter* in *Homer* draws men up to heaven by a chain, and *Mahomet* his

Digitized by Google

disciples by a lock of hair; but he draws the soul, as the sun draws up earthly vapours by infusing its virtue and power into them; or, as the loadstone draws the iron, by the powerful insinuations of his grace. God doth not so much communicate himself to the soul by way of discovery, as by way of impression, as I said before; and indeed not so much by impression neither, as by a mystical and wonderful way of implantation. Religion is not so much something from God, as something of God in the minds of good men, for so the scripture allows us to speak: it is therefore called his image, *Col.* iii. 10. and good men are said to *live according to God in the spirit.* 1 Peter iv. 6. but, as if that were not high enough, it is not only called his image, but even a participation of his divine nature, *2 Pet.* i. 4. something of Christ in the soul, an Infant-Christ as one calls it, alluding to the apostle, *Gal.* iv. 19. where the saving knowledge of Christ is called Christ himself,—*until Christ be formed in you.* True religion is, as it were, God dwelling in the soul, and Christ dwelling in the soul, as the apostles St. John and St. Paul do express it: yea, God himself is pleased thus to express his relation to the godly soul, *Isa* lvii. 15. *I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a humble spirit;* and again, 2 *Cor.* vi. 16. *As God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them.* Pure religion is a beam of the Father of lights, *lumin de lumine;* it is a drop of that eternal fountain of goodness and holiness, the breath of the power of God, a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty, the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness, more beautiful than the sun, and above all the orders of stars; being compared with the light, she is found before it, as the author of the book of *Wisdom* speaks, chap. vii. What is spoken of the eternal Son of God, *Heb.* i. 3. may, in a sense, be truly affirmed of religion in the offspring or branch of heaven, that it is "the effulgency or beaming forth of divine glory;" for there is more of the divine glory and beauty shining forth in one godly soul, than in all things

Digitized by Google

in the world beside: the glorious light of the sun is but a dark shadow of the divine light, not to be compared with the beauty of holiness. An immortal soul doth more resemble the divine nature than any other created being; but religion in the soul is a thousand times more divine than the soul itself. The material world is indeed a darker representation of divine wisdom, power, and goodness; it is as it were the footsteps of God: the immaterial world of angels and spirits does represent him more clearly, and are the face of God: but holiness in the soul doth most nearly resemble him of all created things; one may call it the beauty and glory of his face. Every creature partakes of God indeed; he had no copy but himself and his own essence to frame the world by; so that all these must needs carry some resemblance of their Maker. But no creature is capable of such communications of God as a rational immortal spirit is; and the highest that angel or spirit, or any created nature can be made capable of, is to be *holy as God is holy.* So then if the poet may call the soul, and St. Paul allows him in it, *Divinæ particula auræ;* sure one may rather speak at that rate of religion, which is the highest perfection that the soul can attain to, either in the world that now is, or that which is to come. One soul, any one soul of man, is worth all the world beside for glory and dignity; but the lowest degree of true holiness, pure religion, conformity to the divine nature and will, is more worth than a world of souls, and to be preferred before the essence of angels. I have often admired three great mysteries and mercies, God revealed in the flesh, God revealed in the word, and God revealed in the soul: this last is the mystery of godliness which I am speaking of, but cannot fathom: it is this that the apostle says transcends the sight of our eyes, the capacity of our ears, and all the faculties of our souls too, 1 *Cor.* ii. 9. *Eye hath not seen, &c.* Christ Jesus formed in the soul of man, incarnate in a heart of flesh, is as great a miracle, and a greater mercy, than Christ formed in the womb of a virgin, and incarnate in a human body. There was once much glorying concerning

Digitized by Google

Christ in the *Israel*; but let us call out to the powers of eternity, and the ages of the world to come, to help us to celebrate and magnify Christ in us *the hope of glory;* or, if you will, Christ in us the first-fruits of glory. What has been said may,

First, Help us in our discoveries of that precious pearl, Religion. There is nothing in the world that men do generally more seek, or less find: no nation in the world but hath courted it in one way or other; but alas how few that have obtained it! At this day there are many claims laid to it, all pretending a just title: the men of Judah cry, She is of kin to us; the men of Israel say, We have ten parts in this queen, and we have more right in religion than ye; according as they contended of old about King David, *2 Sam.* xix. They say of Christ, as it was foretold, though perhaps not in the same sense as was foretold, Lo, here he is; and lo, there he is; which hath made many say, he is not at all: or, if I may go on in the same allusion, they live by the rule that there follows, they will not go forth to seek him any where. Mighty strivings, yea, and wars there have been about the *Prince of Peace*, whose he should be: and at this day no question more debated, nor less decided, than which is the religious party in the land. O would to God men would dispute this controversy with works and not with words, much less with blows! Religion is of an eminent pedigree, of a noble descent; you may find her name in the register of heaven, and look where God is, there is she. She carries her name in her forehead; the divine disposition that she is of, the divine works which she worketh, which no one else can work, the same do bear witness which is she. I am ready to say with the man that had been blind, *John* ix. 3. herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not Religion who she is, and yet she is the mighty power of God opening the eyes, changing the hearts, and as it were deifying the souls of men. Why do we not also go about enquiring which of those many stars is the moon in the firmament? If ye ask of the religious party, I will

Digitized by Google

point you to the blessed and eternal God, and say, As he is, so are they, in their capacity, each one resembling the children of a king; or I will point out the religious christian by the same token as Christ himself was marked out to John the Baptist, 1 John i. 33. *Upon whom thou shall see the Spirit descending and remaining, the same is he.* If ye enquire about the children of God, the apostle shall describe them for you, *Eph.* v. 1. the followers of God are his dear children.

That which is most nearly allied to the nature and life of God, that call religion, under whatsoever disguises or reproaches it may go in the world. Examine the world by no lower a mark, than that character that is given of David, 1 *Sam.* xiii. 14. and the man that doth appear to be after God's heart, namely, conformable to his image, compliant with his will, and studious of his glory, pitch upon him, for that is that man, under what name soever he goes, of what party or faction soever he is. And let no soul examine itself by any lower marks than this, "a participation of the divine nature, conformity to the divine image." Examine what alliance your soul hath to God, *whose is the image and superscription.* Religion is a divine accomplishment, an efflux from God, and may, by its affinity to heaven, be discerned from a brat of hell and darkness. Therefore, christians, if you will make a judgment of your state, lay your hearts and lives to the rule, the eternal goodness, the uncreated purity and holiness, and see whether you resemble that copy: for conformity to the image and will of God, that is Religion; and that God will own for his, when all the counterfeits and shadows of it will fly away, and disappear for ever. I fear it may be imputed as a great piece of vanity and idle curiosity to many counterfeit speculative christians, that they are very inquisitive, prying into the hidden rolls of God's decree, the secrets of predestination, to find out the causes and method of their vocation and salvation; in the mean time they are not solicitous for, nor studious of the relation and resemblance that every religious

Digitized by Google

soul bears unto God himself, the heaven that is opened within the godly soul itself, and the whole plot and mystery of salvation transacted upon the heart of a true christian.

There is a vanity which I have observed in many pretenders to nobility and learning, when men seek to demonstrate the one by their coat of arms, and the records of their family, and the other by a gown, or a title, or their names standing in the register of the university, rather than by the accomplishments and behaviours of gentlemen or scholars. A like vanity, I doubt, may be observed in many pretenders to religion: some are searching God's decretals, to find their names written in the book of life; when they should be studying to find God's name written upon their hearts, *holiness to the Lord* engraven upon their souls: some are busy in examining themselves by notes and marks without them; when they should labour to find the marks and prints of God and his nature upon them: some have their religion in their books and authors, which should be the law of God written in the tables of the heart: some glory in the bulk of their duties, and in the multitude of their pompous performances, and religious atchievements, crying, with *Jehu, Come, see here my zeal for the Lord*; whereas it were much more excellent, if one could see their likeness to the Lord, and the characters of divine beauty and holiness drawn upon their hearts and lives. But we, if we would judge rightly of our religious state, must view ourselves in God, who is the fountain of all goodness and holiness, and the rule of all perfection. Value yourselves by your souls, and not by your bodies, estates, friends, or any outward accomplishments, as most men do: but that is not enough; if men rest there, they make an idol of the fairest of God's creatures, even their own souls; therefore value your souls themselves by what they have of God in them.

To study the blessed and glorious God in his word, and to converse with him in his works, is indeed an excellent and honourable employment; but O what a blessed study is it to view him in the communications of himself,

Digitized by Google

and the impressions of his grace upon our own souls! All the thin and subtle speculations which the most raised philosophers have of the essence and nature of God are a poor, and low, and beggarly employment and attainment, in comparison of those blessed visions of God which a godly soul hath in itself, when it finds itself partaker of a divine nature, and living a divine life. O labour to view God and his divine perfections in your own souls, in those copies and transcripts of them which his holy Spirit draws upon the hearts of all godly men. This is the most excellent discovery of God that any soul is capable of; it is better and more desirable than that famous discovery that was made to Moses in the clift of the rock, *Exod.* xxxiii. Nay, I should much rather desire to see the real impression of a God-like nature upon my own soul, to see the crucifying of my own pride and self-will, the mortifying of the mere sensual life, and a divine life springing up in my soul instead of it; I would much rather desire to see my soul glorified in the image and beauty of God put upon it, which is indeed a pledge, yea, and a part of eternal glory, than to have a vision from the Almighty, or hear a voice witnessing from heaven, and saying, *Thou art my beloved Son, in whom my soul is well pleased.* This that I am speaking of is a true foundation of heaven itself in the soul, a real beginning of happiness; for happiness, heaven itself, is nothing else but a perfect conformity, a cheerful and eternal compliance of all the powers of the soul with the will of God: so that as far as a godly soul is thus conformed to God, and filled with his fulness, so far is he glorified upon earth. *Sed heu quantum distamus ab illo!*

Secondly, Let wisdom then be justified of her children; let the children of God, those that are his genuine offspring, rise up and call him blessed, in imitation of their Lord and Saviour, that eldest Son of God, that *first-born amongst many brethren,* who rejoiced in spirit, and said, *I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast revealed these things,* Luke x. 21. or, according to the stile

Digitized by Google

of the apostle Peter, 1 *Pet.* i. 3. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again!* There is no greater contradiction in the world, than a man pretending religion, and yet ascribing it to himself; whereas pure religion is purely of a divine original: besides, religion doth principally consist in the subduing of self-will, in conformity to, and compliance with the divine will in serving the interest of God's glory in the world. Then, and not till then, may a soul be truly called religious, when God becomes greatest of all to it and in it, and the interest of God is so powerfully planted in it, that no other interest, no self-interest, no creature-love, no particular private end, can grow by it, no more than the magicians could stand before Moses, when he came in the power of God to work wonders. So that what Solomon saith of self seeking, *Prov.* xxv. 26. *For men to seek their own glory is not glory;* the like I may safely say upon that double ground that I have laid down, self-religion is not religion. How vainly and madly do men dream of their self-religion carrying them to heaven; when heaven itself is nothing else but the perfection of self-denial, and God's becoming all things to the saints, 1 *Cor.* xv. 28. Instead of advancing men towards heaven, there is nothing in the world that doth more directly make war against heaven, than that proud and petulant spirit of self-will that rules in the children of disobedience. So that when the Holy Ghost would describe David one of the best men, to the best advantage, he describes him with opposition to self and self-will, 1 *Sam.* xiii. 14. *A man after God's own heart;* and again, *Acts* xiii. 36. *He served the will of God in his generation.*

There have been of old a great number of philosophical men, who being raised up above the speculation of their own souls, which is the logical life, unto a contemplation of a deity; and being purged, by a lower kind of virtue and moral goodness, from the pollutions that are in this world through lust, did yet ultimately settle into them-

Digitized by Google

selves, and their own self-love. They were full indeed, but it was not with *the fulness of God*, as the apostle speaks, but with a self-sufficiency; the leaven of self-love lying at the bottom did make them swell with pride and self-conceit. Now these men, though they were free from gross external enormities, yet did not attain to true knowledge of God, nor any true religion, because they did set up themselves to be their own idols, and carry such an image of themselves continually before their eyes, that they had no clear and spiritual discerning of God. They did, as it is storied of one of the Persian kings, enshrine themselves in a temple of their own. But what speak I of heathen philosophers? Is there not the same unclean spirit of self-adoration to found amongst many christians, yea, and teachers of christianity too? witness that whole brood, those men, who, whilst they hang the grace of God upon man's free-will, do utterly rob him of his glory. Some of these have impudently given a short, but unsavoury answer to the apostle's question, in 1 *Cor* iv. 7. *Who maketh you to differ from another? Ego meipsum discerno,* "I make myself to differ?" These men, while they pretend to high attainments, do discover a low and most ignoble spirit: to fasten and feed upon any thing in the creature, is the part of a low and degenerate spirit; on the other hand, it is the greatest perfection of the creature, not to be its own, not to be any thing in itself, or any way distinct from the blessed God, the father and fountain of light and grace. Holy Paul is all along in a different strain, as in 1 *Cor.* xv. 10, *I, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.* I told you before what a fair and honourable character the Holy Ghost hath given of holy David, *a man after God's own heart:* now you may also find a description of these men too in scripture, not much differing from the other in phrase, but very much in sense; it is the same that is given of the proud prince of Tyrus, *Ezek.* xxviii. 2. *They set their heart as the heart of God.* But we, if we do indeed partake of the divine nature, shall not dare to take any part of the

Digitized by Google

divine glory; if we conform to God's image, we shall not set up our own. This self-glorying, in the predominancy of it, is utterly inconsistent with true religion, as fire is with water: for religion is nothing else but the shinings forth of God into the soul, the reflection of a beauty and glory which God hath put upon it. Give all therefore unto God; for whatsoever is kept back, is sacrilegiously purloined from him: glory we in the fulness of God alone, and in self-penury and nothingness. The whole of religion is of God. Do we see and discern the great things of God? It is by that light that God hath set up in us; according to that of the apostle, 1 *Cor.* ii. 11. *The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.* That love whereby we love him, he first shed abroad in our hearts. If our souls be beautiful, it is with his brightness, the beauty and glory of essential holiness, according to that of the apostle, *Heb.* xiii. 10. *Partakers of his holiness.* If we be really and truly full, we receive it of his fulness, according to that of the apostle, *Eph.* iii. 19. *Filled with all the fulness of God.* In a word, if we be in any God-like dispositions, like unto him, it is by his spreading of his image in us, and over us. By all which, it appears to be a thing not only wicked and unwarrantable, but utterly impossible for a godly soul to exalt himself against God, for grace to advance itself against divine glory; for grace is nothing else but a communication of divine glory; and God is then glorified, when the soul in holy and gracious dispositions becomes like unto him. How is it possible that grace should be a shadow to obscure divine glory, when itself is nothing else, as it comes from God, but a beam of glory? and as it is found in the creature, may properly be called a reflection of it. To conclude then, be ye persuaded, that a man hath so much of God as he hath of humility, and self-denial, and self-nothingness, and no more; he is so far of God, as he loves him, honours him, imitates him, and lives to him, and no farther.

Digitized by Google

Thirdly, By this discovery of the original of religion, we come to understand the original of sin and wickedness. And here, according to the method wherein I spoke of the original of religion, I might shew you how the original of sin from without is of the devil, who first ushered it into the world, and ceased not to tempt men to it continually; so also of men, who are his instruments; and that it does, in a sense, spring from many occasions without. But these things are more improperly said to be the causes of sin. The inward cause is the corrupt heart of man, that unclean spirit, that devilish nature, which is indeed the worst and most pernicious devil in the world to man. It is an old saying, *Homo homini dæmon*; one man is a devil to another; which though it be in some sense true, yet it is more proper to say, *Homo sibi dæmon*, man is a devil to himself; taking the spirit and principle of apostasy, that rebellious nature, for the devil. which indeed doth best deserve that name. But yet, if we enquire more strictly into the original and nature of this monster, we shall best know what to say of it, and how to describe it, by what we have heard of religion. Sin then, to speak properly, is nothing else but a degeneration from a holy state, an apostasy from a holy God. Religion is a participation of God, and sin is a straggling off from him. Therefore it is wont to be defined by negatives, a departure from God, a forsaking of him, a living in the world without him, &c. The soul's falling off from God, does describe the general nature of sin; but then as it sinks into itself, or settles upon the world, and fastens upon the creature, or any thing therein; so it becomes specified, and is called pride, covetousness, ambition, and by many other names. All souls are the offspring of God, were originally formed into his image and likeness; and when they express the purity and holiness of the divine nature, in being perfect as God is perfect, then are they called the children of God: but those impure spirits that do lapse and slide from God, may be said, to implant themselves into another stock by their own low and earthly lives,

Digitized by Google

and are no more owned for the children of God, but, *are of their father the devil*, John x. 44. By which you may understand the low and base original of sin: nothing can be so vile as that which, to speak properly, is nothing else but a perfect falling off from glory itself. By this you may also, by the way, take notice of the miserable condition of unholy souls. We need not call for fire and brimstone to paint out the wretched state of sinful souls. Sin itself is hell and death, and misery to the soul, as being a departure from goodness and holiness itself; I mean from God, in conjunction with whom the happiness, and blessedness, and heaven of a soul do consist. Avoid it therefore, as you would avoid being miserable.

CHAP. II.

True religion described, as to the nature of it, by water; a metaphor usual in the scriptures, 1. *By reason of the cleansing virtue of it. The defiling nature of sin, and the beauty of holiness manifested.* 2. *By reason of the quenching virtue of it. This briefly touched upon, and the more full handing of it referred to its proper place. The nature of religion described by a well of water: that it is a principle in the souls of men, proved by much scripture. An examination of religion by this test; by which examination are excluded all things that are merely external; external reformations and performances instanced in. A godly man hath neither the whole of his business, nor his motives lying without him. In the same examination many things internal found not to be religion: it is no sudden passion of the mind; no, not though the same amount to an extasy; nor any thing begotten and maintained by fancy, and the mere power of imagination.*

I COME now to speak of the nature of true religion, which is here described by our blessed Lord, by *a well of*

Digitized by Google

water. First, By water. *Secondly,* By a well of water. I shall speak something of both these, but more briefly of the former.

1. Pure religion, or gospel-grace, is described by water. This is a comparison very familiar in the holy Scriptures, both of the Old Testament and the New. By this similitude gospel-grace was typified in the ceremonial law, wherein both persons and things, ceremonially unclean, were commanded to be washed in water, as is abundantly to be seen in that administration. Under this notion the same grace is prayed for by the Psalmist, when he had defiled himself in the bed of a stranger, *Ps.* li. 7. *Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.* He had drunk water out of a strange cistern, as his son Solomon describes that unclean act, *Prov.* v. 15. and now he calls out for water from the fountain of grace, to undefile him: he now cries out for water from the fountain of grace, the blessed Messiah, that sprung up into the world at Bethlehem, and that with more earnestness than formerly we read that he wished for the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate, 2 *Sam.* xxiii. 15. In the same phrase the same grace is promised by the ministry of the prophets, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto us. Thus we read of the fair and flourishing state of the church, *Isa.* lviii. 11. *Thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not;* and of the fruitful state of the gospel proselytes, *Joel* iii. 18. *All the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim.* When promises, that they are understood of the grace of sanctification, the prophet Ezekiel sheweth plainly, *Ezek.* xxxvi. 25. *I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you;* for ordinary elementary water cannot cleanse men from idols. The prophet Isaiah also puts it out of doubt, whose prophesy, together with the interpretation of it, we find both in one verse, *Isa.* xliv. 3. *I will*

Digitized by Google

pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thy offspring. By the same ceremony the gospel dispensation shadows out the same mystery in the sacrament of baptism; and, by the same phrase our Saviour offers and promises the same grace, *John* vii. 37. *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink:* and his apostles after him, who, in allusion to water, call this grace the *washing of regeneration,* Tit. iii. 5. To which I might add 1 *Pet.* iii. 21. and many other texts if it needed.

Now, as the grace of God is compared to fire, because of its refining nature, and consuming the dross and refuse of lust in the soul; and to other things for other reasons: so is it compared to water, especially for those two properties, namely, cleansing and quenching: for observe this by the way, that it is a very injurious thing to the Holy Ghost, to press the metaphors which he useth in scripture, further than they do naturally and freely serve. Neither are we to stick in the letter of the metaphor, but to attend unto the scope of it. If we tenaciously adhere to the phrase, wanton wits will be ready to quarrel with absurdities, and so unawares run into strange blasphemies: they will cry out presently, how can fire wash? when they read that of the prophet, *Isa.* iv. 4. *The Lord will wash away the filth of the daughter of Zion, by the spirit of burning.* But who art thou, O man! that wilt teach him to speak, who formed the tongue? The Spirit of God intends the virtue and property of things, when he names them; and that we must mainly attend to.

1. Therefore, by the phrase water, is the cleansing nature of religion commended to us: it is the undefiling of the soul, which sin and wickedness hath polluted: sin is often described in scripture by filthiness, loathsomeness, abomination, uncleanness, a spot, a blemish, a stain, a pollution; which indeed is a most proper description of it. The spots of leprosy, and the scurf of the foulest scurvy, are beauty-spots in comparison of it: Job upon the dunghil,

Digitized by Google

furnished cap-a-pee with scabs and boils, was not half so loathsome as goodly Absalom, in whose body *there was no blemish from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head;* but his soul was stained with the sanguine spots of malice and revenge, and festered with the loathsome carbuncle and tumor of ambition. Lazarus, lying at the gates full of raw and running sores, was a far more lovely object in the pure eyes of God, than dame Jezebel, looking out at the window, adorned with spots and paints. If the best of a godly man that he hath of his own, even his righteousness, be as a filthy rag, *Isa.* lxiv. 6. whence shall we borrow a phrase fool enough to describe the worst of a wicked man, even his wickedness? I need say no more of it, I can say no worse of it, than to tell you it is something contrary to God, who is the eternal Father of light, who is beauty, and brightness, and glory itself; or, to give it you in the apostle's phrase, *Rom.* iii. 23. *A falling short of the glory of God.* Which hath made me many times to wonder, and almost ready to cry out with the prophet, *Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this!* when I have seen poor, ignorant, wicked, and profane wretches, passing by a person or a family visited with some loathsome disease, in a mixture of fear and disdain, stopping their noses, and hastening away; when their own souls have been more vile than the dung upon the earth, spotted with ignorance and atheism, swollen with the risings of pride and self-will, and contempt of God and his holy image. This might well be matter of wonder to any man, till he consider with himself, that one part of these mens uncleanness, is that very blindness which keeps them from descerning it: I speak principally of the defilement of the soul; though indeed the same do pollute the whole conversation: every action springing from such an unclean heart, thereby becomes filthy; even as Moses's hand, put into his bosom, became leprous, *Exod.* iv. 6. or rather as one that is unclean by a dead body, defileth all that he toucheth, *Hag.* ii. 13.

Now, religion is the cleansing of this unclean spirit

Digitized by Google

and conversation; so that, though the soul were formerly as filthy and odious as Augeus's stable, when once those living waters flow into it, and through it, from the pure fountain of grace and holiness, the Spirit of our God, one may say of it as the apostle of his Corinthians, 1 *Cor.* vi. 11. *Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified,* &c. The soul that before was white as leprosy, is now white as wool, *Isa.* i. 18. The soul that before was like Moses's hand, leprous as snow, is now like David's heart, white as snow; yea, and whiter too, *Ps.* li. 7. O what a beauty and glory is upon that godly soul, that shines with the image and brightness of God upon it! Solomon, in all his glory, was not beautiful like such a soul: nay, I dare say, the splendor of the sun, in its greatest strength and altitude, is a miserable glimmering, if it be compared with the day star of religion, that even in this life arises in the heart; or, if you will, in the prophet's stile, *the sun of righteousness, which ariseth with healing in his wings,* upon them that fear the name of God. To speak without a metaphor, the godly soul, having entertained into itself the pure effluxes of divine light and love, breathes after nothing more than to see more familiarity, and love more ardently: its inclinations are pure and holy; its motions spiritual and powerful; its delights high and heavenly; it may be said to rest in its love; and yet it may be said, that love will not suffer it to rest, but is still carrying it out into a more intimate union with its beloved object. What is said of the ointment of Christ's name, *Cant.* i. 3. is true of the water of his Spirit, it is *poured forth, therefore do the virgins love him.* Religion begets a chaste and virgin love in the soul towards that blessed God that begot it; it bathes itself in the fountain that produced it; and suns itself perpetually in the warm beams that first hatched it. Religion issues from God himself, and is ever issuing out towards God alone, passionately breathing with the holy Psalmist, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? In earth there is none that I desire beside thee!* The soul that formerly may be

Digitized by Google

said to have lain among the pots, by reason of its filthiness, is now as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold: the soul that formerly may be said to have sitten down by the flesh-pots of Egypt, in regard of its sensual and earthly loves, being redeemed by the almighty grace of God, is upon its way to the holy land, hastening to a country not earthly but heavenly, *Heb.* xi. 16. This pure principle being put into the soul, puts it upon holy studies, indites holy meditations, directs it to high and noble ends, and makes all its embraces to be pure and chaste, labouring to compass God himself, which before were adulterous and idolatrous, free for sin, and self, and the world, to lodge and lie down in. In a word, this offspring of heaven, this King's daughter, the godly soul, *is all glorious within*; yea, and outwardly too, *she is clothed with wrought gold*, Ps. xlv. 13. Her faith within is more precious than gold, 1 *Pet.* i. 7. and her conversation is curiously made up of an embroidery of good works, some of piety, some of charity, some of sobriety, but all of purity, and shineth with more noble and excellent splendor, than the high-priest's garments and breast-plate spangled with such variety of precious stones. This precious ointment, this holy unction, as the apostle calls it, 1 *John* ii. 20. is as diffusive of itself, and ten thousand times more fragrant, than that of Aaron, so much commended in *Ps.* cxxxiii. that ran down from his head upon his beard, and from thence upon the skirts of his garment. *Not my feet only, but my hands and my head, Lord*, said *Peter*, John xiii. 9. not well knowing what he said; but the soul that is truly sensible of the excellent purity which is caused by divine washings, longs to have the whole man, the whole life also, made partaker of it, and cries Lord, not my head only, not my heart only, but my hands and my feet also, make me wholly pure, as God is pure. In a word then, true religion is the cleansing of the soul, and all the powers of it; so that, whereas murderers sometimes lodged in it; now righteousness; the den of thieves, thievish lusts, and loves, and

Digitized by Google

interests, and ends, which formerly stole away the soul from God, its right owner, is now become a temple fit for the great King to dwell, and live, and reign in: and the whole conversation is turned from its wonted vanity, worldliness, and iniquity, and is continually employed about things that are *true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report,* Phil. iv. 8.

2. By the phrase *water,* the quenching nature of religion is commended to us. God hath endued the immortal soul with a restless appetite, and raging thirst after some chief good, which the heart of every man is continually groping after, and catching at, though indeed few find it, because they seek it where it is not to be found. If we speak properly, it is not gold or silver, or popular applause, which the covetous or ambitious mind doth ultimately aim at, but some chief good, happiness, sufficiency, and satisfaction in these things; wherein they are more guilty of blasphemy than atheism: for it is clear that they do not deny a supreme good; for that which men do chiefly and ultimately aim at, is their god, be it what it will; but they do verily blaspheme the true God, when they place their happiness there where it is not to be found, and attribute that fulness and sufficiency to something else besides the living God. Sin hath not destroyed the nature and capacity of the rational soul, but hath diverted the mind from its adequate object, and hath sunk it into the creature, where it wanders hither and thither, like a banished man, from one den and cave to another, but is secure no where. A wicked man, who is loosed from his centre by sin, and departed from the fountain of his life, flies low in his affections, and flutters perpetually about the earth, and earthly objects, but can find no more rest for the foot of his soul, than Noah's dove could find for the sole of her foot. Now, religion is the hand that pulls this wandering bird into her own ark from whence she was departed; it settles the soul upon its proper centre, and quenches its burning thirst after happiness. And for this reason it is called water in scrip-

Digitized by Google

ture, as appears from *Isa.* lviii. 11. *The Lord shall satisfy thy soul in drought;* and *Isa.* xliv. 3. *I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground;* compared with *John* vii. 37. *Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.* Religion is a taste of infinite goodness, which quenches the soul's thirst after all other created and finite good; even as that taste which honest Nathanael had of Christ's divinity, took him off from any expectation of the Messiah to come, and made him cry out presently, *Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel,* John i. 49. And every religious soul hath such a taste of God, even in this life, which, though it do not perfectly fill him, yet doth perfectly assure him where all fulness dwells. But of this I shall have occasion to discourse more largely, when I come to treat of the consequent of true religion.

I proceed, therefore, to the second phrase, whereby our Saviour describes the nature of true religion; it is a well, a fountain in the soul; *Shall be in him a well of water.* From which phrase, to wave niceties, I shall only observe, "That Religion is a principle in the souls of men."

The water that Christ pours into the soul is not like the water that he pours upon our streets, that washes them, and runs away; but it becomes a cleansing principle within the soul itself; every drop from God becomes a fountain in man; not as if man had a well in himself, or were the first spring of his own motions towards God: I find not any will in the natural man so divinely free. God hath indeed given this to his natural Son, his only begotten Son, to have *life in himself,* John v. 26. but not to any of his adopted ones. If you ask me concerning man in his natural capacity, I am so far from thinking that he hath a self-quickening power, a principle of life in himself, that I must needs assert the contrary with the apostle, that he is *dead in trespasses and sins,* Eph. ii. 1. so far from thinking that he hath in himself a well of water, that I must call him, with the prophet, *Isa.* xliv. 3. *thirsty and dry ground.* As for

Digitized by Google

the regenerate man, I will not enter into that deep controversy concerning the co-operation of man's will with the Spirit of God, and its subordination to that in all gracious acts, or what a kind of cause of them this renewed will of man may be safely called; only, I will affirm, that repenting and believing are properly man's acts, and yet they are performed by God's power; first, Christ must give this water ere it can be a well of water in the soul; which is enough, I suppose, to clear me from siding with either of those parties, whether those that ascribe to God that which he cannot do, or those that ascribe to free-will that which God alone can do. But I fear nothing from these controversies; for that way wherein I shall discourse of this matter, will nothing at all border upon them.

This, then, I affirm, that religion is a living principle in the souls of good men. I cannot better describe the nature of religion, than to say it is a nature; for so does the apostle speak, or at least allows us to speak, when he calls it a participation of a divine nature, 2 *Pet.* i. 4. Nothing but a nature can partake of a nature; a man's friend may partake of his goodness and kindness, but his child only partakes of his nature: he that begets, begets a nature; and so doth he that begets again. The sun enlightens the world outwardly, but it does not give a sun-like nature to the things so enlightened; and the rain doth moisten the earth, and refresh it inwardly, but it does not beget the nature of water in the earth: *But this water that I give*, says our Saviour, *becometh a well of water in the soul.* Religion is not any thing without a man, hanging upon him, or annexed to him; neither is it every something that is in a man, as we shall see anon; but it is a divine principle informing and actuating the souls of good men, a living and lively principle, a free and flowing principle, a strong and lasting principle, an inward and spiritual principle. I must not speak of all these distinctly in this place, for fear of interfering in my discourse.

Digitized by Google

When I say religion is a principle, a vital form acting the soul, and all the powers of it, an inward nature, &c. saith not the scripture the same here, a well or fountain of water? And elsewhere, a *new man, the hidden man of the heart, the inward man,* Eph. iv. 24. 1 Pet. iii. 4. As the soul is called an inward man, respective to the body, 2 *Cor.* iv. 16. so religion is called an inward man, respective to the soul itself, *Rom.* vii. 22. It is a man within a man.—The man that is truly alive to God, hath in him not only inward parts, for so a dead man hath, but an inward man, an inward nature and principle. Again, it is called a root, *Job* xix. 28. or, if not there, yet plainly in *Mark* iv. 17. where temporary professors are said to have no root in themselves. And this is, by the same propriety of speech whereby a wicked principle is called *a root of bitterness,* Heb. xii. 15. Again, it is called a seed, *the seed of God,* 1 John iii. 9. where this seed of God is called an abiding or remaining principle. In the first creation, God made the trees of the earth, having their seed in themselves, *Gen.* i. 11. and in the new creation, these trees of righteousness of God's planting, are also made with seed in themselves, though not of themselves: it is said to be the seed of God indeed, but remaining in the godly soul. Again, it is called a treasure, in opposition to an alms or annuity, that lasteth but for a day or a year, as a well of water, in opposition to a draught of water; and a treasure of the heart, in opposition to all outward and earthly treasures, *Matt.* xii. 35.—It is a treasure affording continual expences, not exhausted, yea, increased by expences; wherein it exceeds all treasures in the world. By the same propriety of speech, sin is called a treasure too, but it is an evil treasure, as our Saviour speaks in that same place. Do you not see what a stock of wickedness sinful men have within themselves, which, although they spent upon ever since they were born, yet it is not impaired, nay, it is much augmented thereby: and shall not the second Adam bestow something as certain and permanent upon his offspring, as the first

Digitized by Google

Adam conveyed to his posterity? Though men have something without them, to guide them in the way of life, yet it is some living principle within them, that denominates them living men. The scripture will abundantly inform you which is the true circumcision, *Col.* ii. 11. the true sacrifice to God, *Ps.* li. 17. And indeed the law itself is not so much to be considered as it was engraven in tables of stone, as *being written in the heart*, Jer. xxxi. 33. The Jews needed not have taken up their rest in the law, considered as an outward rule or precept; for they knew, or might have known, that God requireth *truth in the inward parts*, as one of themselves, a prophet and king of their own, acknowledgeth, *Ps.* li. 6. But I doubt many christians are also sick of the same disease, whilst they view the gospel as an history, and an external dispensation; whereas the apostle, when he opposeth it to the law, seems altogether to make it an internal thing, a vital form and principle seated in the minds and spirits of men, 2 *Cor.* iii. 3.

The law was an external rule or dispensation that could not give life, though it shewed the way to it, *Gal.* iii. 21. but the gospel, in the most proper notion of it, seems to be an internal impression from God, a living principle, whereby the soul is enabled to express a real conformity to God himself. If we consider the gospel in the history of it, and as a piece of book-learning, it is as weak and impotent a thing as the law was; and men may be as remiss and formal in the possession of this as they were of that, which we see by daily sad experience. But if we consider the gospel as an efflux of life and power from God himself upon the soul, producing life wherever it comes, then we have a clear distinction between the law and the gospel; to which the apostle seems to refer, when he calls the *Corinthians the epistle of Christ, not written with ink, nor in tables of stone, but with the spirit of the living God, in fleshly tables of the heart*, 2 Cor. iii. 3. According to which notion of the law and gospel, I think we may, with a learned man of our own, come to a good understanding of that tormented text, *Jer.*

Digitized by Google

xxx. 31. quoted by the apostle, *Heb.* x. 8. *This is the covenant that I will make, I will put my law into their minds, &c.* The gospel doth not so much consist in verbis as in virtue; a divine principle of religion in the soul, is the best gospel: and so Abraham and Moses under the law, were true gospellers; and, on the other hand, all carnal christians that converse with the gospel only as a thing without them, are as truly legal, and as far short of the righteousness of God, as ever any of the Jews were. Thus we see that religion is a principle in the souls of good men,—*shall be in him a well of water.*

We shall here now take notice of the difference between the true, and all counterfeit religions. Religion is that pearl of great price, which few men are possessed of though all men pretend to it, Laodicean-like, saying, *they are rich and need nothing*, when indeed *they are poor and have nothing*. This, then shall be the test by which, at present, we will a little try the counterfeit pearls. True religion is an inward nature, an inward and abiding principle in the minds of good men, *a well of water.*

1. Then we must exclude all things that are merely external; these are not it. Religion is not something annexed to the soul, *ab extra*, but a new nature put into it. And here we shall glance at two things:

1*st*, A godly soul does not find the whole of his business lying without him. Religion does not consist in external reformations, though never so many and specious. A false and slight religion may serve to tie mens hands, and reduce their outward actions to a fair seemliness in the eyes of men: but true religion's main dominion and power is over the soul, and its business lies mostly in reforming and purging the heart, with all the affections and motions thereof. It is not a battering ram coming from without, and serving to beat down the out-works of open and visible enormities of life, but it enters with a secret and sweet power into the soul itself, and reduces it from its rebellious temper, and persuades it willingly to surrender itself, and all that is in it.

Digitized by Google

Sin may be beaten out of the outward conversation, and yet retire and hide itself in the secret places of the soul, and there bear rule as perfectly by wicked loves and suits, as ever it did by profane and notorious practices. A man's hands may be tied by some external cords cast upon them, from visible revenge, and yet murders may lodge in the temple of his heart, as murderers lodged in the temple of old: mens tongues may be tied up from the foul of sin of giving fair words concerning themselves; very shame may chastise them out of proud boastings, and self-exaltings, when, in the mean time, they swell in self-conceit, and are not afraid to bear an unchaste and sinful love towards their own perfections, and adore an image of self set up in their hearts. What a fair outside the Pharisee had, himself will best describe, for indeed it is one of his properties to describe himself, *Luke* xviii. 11. *God, I thank thee that I am not, &c.* But if you will have a draught of his inside, you may best take it from our Saviour, *Matt.* xxiii. 23. Neither doth religion consist in external performances, though never so many, and seemingly spiritual. Many professors of christianity, I doubt, sink all their religion into a constant course of duties, and a model of performances, being mere strangers to the life, and strength, and sweetness of true religion. Those things are needful, and useful, and helpful, yea, and honourable, because they have a relation and some tendency to God; but they are apt to become snares and idols to superstitious minds, who conceit that God is some way gratified by these; and so they take up their rest in them. That religion, that only varnishes and beautifies the outside, tunes the tongue to prayer and conference, instructs and extends the hands to diligence and alms-deeds, that awes the conversation into some external righteousness or devotion, is here excluded, as also by the apostle, 1 *Cor.* xiii. 1. Much less can that pass for religion, that spends itself about forms, and opinions, and parties, and many disputable points, which we have seen so much of in our own generation. The religion that runs upon models, and

Digitized by Google

turns upon interests, as a door turns upon its hinges, is a poor narrow scant thing, and may easily view itself at once, all together from first to last. Men may be as far from the kingdom of heaven in their more spiritual forms, and orthodox opinions, as they were in their more carnal and erroneous, if they take up their rest in them: neither is it the pursuing of any interest that will denominate them religious, but the grand interest of their souls.

2dly, A godly soul in its more inward and spiritual acts, hath not its motive without it: for a man may be somewhat more inward in his motions, and yet as outward in his motives as the former. Religious acts, and gracious motions, are not originally and primarily caused by some weights hung upon the soul, either by God or men, neither by the worldly blessings which God gives, nor the heavy afflictions which he sends. The wings, by which the godly soul flies out towards God, are not waxed to it, as the poets feign Icarus's to have been; but they grow out of itself, as the wings of an eagle that flies swiftly towards heaven: on the other side, a soul may be pressed down unto humiliation under the heavy weight of God's judgments, that has no mind to stoop, no self-denying or self-abasing disposition in it. Thus you may see Jehu flying upon the wings of ambition and revenge, borne up by successes in his government; and his predecessor Ahab bowing down mournfully under an heavy sentence. The laws, and penalties, and encouragements, and observations of men, sometimes put a weight upon the soul too, but they beget a more sluggish, uneven, and unkindly motion in it. You may expect, that under this head I should speak something of heaven and hell; and truly so I may very pertinently, for I think they belong to this place. If you take heaven properly, for a full and glorious union to God, and fruition of him, and hell for an eternal separation and straggling from the divinity; and suppose that the love of God, and the fear of living without him, be well drunk into the soul, then verily these are pure and religious principles: but if we view them as things

Digitized by Google

merely without us, and reserved for us, and under those common carnal notions of delectableness and dreadfulness, they are no higher nor better motives to us, than the carnal Jews had in the wilderness, when they turned their backs upon Egypt, where they had been in bondage, and set their faces towards Canaan, where they hoped to find milk and honey, peace, plenty, and liberty. A soul is not carried to heaven, as a body is carried to the grave, upon men's shoulders; it is not borne up by props, whether human or divine; nor carried to God in a chariot, as a man is carried to see his friend: the holy fire of ardent love, wherein the soul of Elijah had been long carried up towards God, was something more excellent, and indeed more desirable, than the fiery chariot by which his body and soul were translated together. Religion is a spring of motion which God hath put into the soul itself.

And as all things that are external, whether actions or motives, are excluded in this examination, which we make of religion; so neither,

2. Must we allow of every thing that is internal to be religion. And therefore,

1*st*, It is not a fit, a start, a sudden passion of the mind, caused by the power and strength of some present conviction in the soul, which, in a hot mood, will needs make out after God in all haste. This may fitly be compared to the rash and rude motion of the host of Israel, who, being chidden for their slothfulness over night, rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, *Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the Lord hath promised, for we have sinned*, Numb. xiv. 40. And indeed it fares with these men oftentimes as it did with those, both as to the undertaking, and as to the success; their motion is as sinful as their station; and their success is answerable, they are driven back and discomfited in their enterprize. Nay, though this passion might arise so high, as to be called an extasy or a rapture, yet it deserves not the name of religion: "For religion is," as one speaks ele-

Digitized by Google

gantly, like the natural heat that is radicated in the hearts of living creatures, which hath the dominion of the whole body and sends forth warm blood and spirits, and vital nourishment into every part and member; it regulates and orders the motions of it in a due and even manner." But these extatical souls, though they may blaze, like a comet, and swell like a torrent or land-flood for a time, and shoot forth fresh and high for a little season, are soon extinguished, emptied, and dried up, because they have not a principle, a stock to spend upon, or, as our Saviour speaks, *no root in themselves.* These mens motions and actions bear no more proportion to religion, than a land-flood that swells high, and runs swiftly, but it is only during the rain; or, in the scripture phrase, than a morning dew than soon passes away, *Hosea* vi. 4. it is like a well or fountain of water.

2dly, If religion be a principle, a new nature in the soul, then it is not a mere mechanism, a piece of art. Art imitates nature; nothing more ordinary, I doubt, than for religion itself, that a new nature, to go into an art. I need not tell you how all the external acts and shootings forth of religion, may be dissembled and imitated by art, and be acted over by a mimical apish Pharisee, who finds nothing at all of the gentle and mighty heat, not the divine and noble life of it in his own soul, whereby he may fairly deceive the credulous world, as I have partly hinted already. But it is possible, I wish it be not common, for men that are somewhat more convinced, enlightned, and affected, to imitate the very power and spirit of religion, and to deceive themselves too, as if they possessed some true living principle; and herein they exceed the most exquisite painters. Now, this may be done by the power of a quick and raised fancy; men hearing such glorious things spoken of heaven, the city of the great King, the new Jerusalem, may be carried out by the power of self-love to wish themselves there, being mightily taken with a conceit of the place. But how shall they come at it? Why, they have seen in books, and heard in discourses, of certain signs of

Digitized by Google

grace, and evidences of salvation; and now they set their fancies on work, to find or make such things in themselves. Fancy is well acquainted with the several affections of love, fear, joy, grief, which are in the soul, and having a great command over the animal spirits, it can send them forth to raise up these affections, even almost when it listeth; and when it hath raised them, it is but putting to some thoughts of God and heaven, and then these look like a handsome platform of true religion drawn in the soul, which they presently view, and fall in love with, and think they do even taste of the powers of the world to come, when indeed it is nothing but a self-fulness and sufficiency that they feed upon. Now, you may know this artificial religion by this; these men can vary it, alter it, enlarge it, straiten it, and new-mold it at pleasure, according to what they see in others, or, according to what themselves like best; one while acting over the joy and confidence of some christians, anon the humiliation and broken-heartedness of others. But this fanciful religion, proceeding indeed from nothing but low and carnal conceits of God and heaven, is of a flitting and vanishing nature. But true christians are gently, yet powerfully moved by the natural force of true goodness, and the beauty of God, and move on steadily and constantly in their way to him, and pursuit of him. The spirit of regeneration in good men spreads itself upon the understanding, and sweetly diffuses itself through the will and affections, which makes true religion to be a consistent and thriving principle in the soul, as not being acted upon the stage of imagination, but upon the highest powers of the soul itself, and it may be discerned by the evenness of its motions, and the immortality of its nature; for a good man, though indeed he cannot go on always with like speed and cheerfulness in his way, yet is not willing at any time to be quite out of it.

By this same nature of true religion you may examine all those spurious and counterfeit religions, that spring from a natural belief of a diety, from convictions, observations,

Digitized by Google

fleshly and low apprehensions of heaven, book-learning, and the precepts of men, as the prophet calls them, and the rest, which are seated in the fancy, and swim in the brain; whose effect is but to gild the outward man, or, at best, but to move the soul by an external force, in an unnatural, inconstant, and transient manner. In a word, all these pretenders to religion may seem to have water, but no well; as there are others, deep men, principled indeed with learning, policy, ingenuity, &c. but not with true goodness, whom the apostle calls *wells*, but *without water*, 2 Pet. ii. 17. But the truly godly, and God-like soul, hath in itself a principle of pure religion. *The water that I shall give him, shall be a well of water, springing up into eternal life.*

CHAP. III.

Containing the first property mentioned of true Religion, viz. *The freeness and unconstrainedness of it: this discovered in several outward acts of morality and worship; as also in the more inward acts of the soul. This freedom considered as to its author; in which is considered how far the command of God may be said to act a godly soul. Secondly, Considered as an object. Two cautionary concessions; 1st, That some things without the soul may be said to be motives; how far afflictions and temporal prosperity may be said to be so. 2dly, That there is a constraint lying upon the godly soul; which yet takes not away its freedom. An inquiry into forced devotion, and first into the causes of it,* viz. *Men themselves, and that upon a threefold account, other men, or the providences of God. 2dly, Into the properties of it, proving that it is for the most part dry and spiritless, needy and penurious, uneven, and not permanent.*

I PROCEED now, from the nature of religion, to speak of the properties of it, as many of them as are couched under

Digitized by Google

this phrase, *springing up into everlasting life.* Not to squeeze the phrase any farther than it will naturally afford discourse, I shall only take notice of these three properties of true religion, contained in the word, *springing up*, viz. the freeness, activity, and permanency, or perseverance of it.

The first property of it, couched under this phrase, is, that it is free and unconstrained. Religion is a principle, and it flows and acts freely in the soul, after the manner of a fountain; and, in the day of its mighty power, makes the people a willing people, *Ps.* cx. 3. and the soul, in whom it is truly seated, to become a free-will offering unto God. Alexander the Great subdued the world with force of arms, and made men rather his tributaries and servants, than his lovers and friends; but the great God, the King of souls, obtains an amicable conquest over the hearts of his elect, and overpowers them in such a manner, that they love to be his servants, and do willingly and readily obey him, without dissimulation or constraint, without mercenariness or merosity: in which they are unlike to the subjects of the kingdoms of this world, who are kept in their duties by fear and force, not from a pure kindness and benevolence of mind, to whom "the present yoke is always grievous." Hence it is that the increase of this people is called their flowing unto the Lord, *Isa.* ii. 2. *The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established, and all nations shall flow unto it;* and again, *Jer.* xxxi. 12. *They shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord.* And the disposition of this people is described to be a hearty and willing frame, *Eph.* vi. 6, 7. and elsewhere often to the same purpose. Now, this willingness or freeness of godly souls might be explained and confirmed by the consideration both of their outward and inward acts.

1. As to the outward acts of service which the true christian doth perform, he is freely carried out towards them, without any constraint or force. If he keep himself from the evils of the place, and age, and company, wherein

Digitized by Google

he lives and converses, it is not by a restraint which is upon him merely from without him, but by a principle of holy temperance planted in his soul: it is the seed of God abiding in him that preserves him from the commission of sin, 1 *John* iii. 9. He is not kept back from sin as a horse by a bridle, but by an inward and spiritual change made in his nature. On the other hand, if he employ himself in any external acts of moral or instituted duty, he does it freely, not as of necessity, or by constraint. If you speak of acts of charity, the godly man gives from a principle of love to God, and kindness to his brother, and so cheerfully, not grudgingly, or of necessity, 2 *Cor.* ix. 7. An alms may be wrung out of a miser, but it proceeds from the liberal soul as a stream from its fountain: therefore he is called a deviser of liberal things, and one that standeth upon liberalities, as those last words of *Isa.* xxxii. 8. are rendered by the Dutch translators. If you speak of righteousness or temperance, he is not over-ruled by power, or compelled by laws, but indeed acted by the power of that law which is written or engraven upon his mind. If you speak of acts of worship, whether moral or instituted, in all these he is also free, as to any constraint.

Prayer is not his task, or a piece of penance, but it is the natural cry of the new-born soul; neither does he take it up as a piece of poliey, to bribe God's justice, or engage men's charity, to purchase favour with God or man, or his own clamorous conscience: but he prays, because he wants, and loves, and believes; he wants the fuller presence of that God whom he loves; he loves the presence which he wants; he believes that he that loves him will not suffer him to want any good thing that he prays for. And therefore he does not bind up himself severely, and limit himself penuriously to a morning and evening sacrifice and solemnity, as unto certain rent-seasons, wherein to a pay a homage of dry devotion; but his loving and longing soul, disdaining to be confined within canonical hours, is ferquently soaring in some heavenly raptures or other, and

Digitized by Google

sallying forth in holy ejaculations: he is not content with some weak essays towards heaven, in set and formal prayer, once or twice a-day, but labours also to be all the day long sucking in those divine influences, and streams of grace, by the mouth of faith, which he begged in the morning by the tongue of prayer; which hath made me sometimes to think it a proper speech to say, the faith of prayer, as well as the prayer of faith; for believing, and hanging upon divine grace, doth really drink in what prayer opens its mouth for, and is, in effect, a powerful kind of praying in silence: by believing, we pray; as well as in praying we do believe.

A truly godly man hath not his hands tied up merely by the force of a national law, no, nor yet by the authority of the fourth commandment, to keep one in seven a day of rest; as he is not content with mere resting upon the sabbath, knowing that neither working, nor ceasing from work, doth of itself, commend a soul to Gon, but doth press after intimacy with God in the duties of his worship; so neither can he be content with one sabbath in a week, nor think himself absolved from holy and heavenly meditations any day in the week; but labours to make every day a sabbath, as to the keeping of his heart up unto God in a holy frame, and to find every day to be a sabbath, as to the communications of God unto his soul: though the necessities of his body will not allow him, it may be, (though indeed God hath granted this to some men) to keep every day as a sabbath of rest; yet the necessities of his soul do call upon him to make every day, as far as may be, a sabbath of communion with the blessed God. If you speak of fasting, he keeps not fasts merely by virtue of a civil, no, nor a divine institution; but, from a principle of godly sorrow afflicts his soul for sin, and daily endeavours more and more to be emptied of himself, which is the most excellent fasting in the world. If you speak of thanksgiving, he does not give thanks by laws and ordinances, but having in himself a law of thankfulness, and an ordinance of love engraven upon, and deeply radicated in his soul, delights to

Digitized by Google

live unto God, and to make his heart and life a living descant upon the goodness and love of God; which is the most divine way of thank-offering in the world; it is the hallelujah which the angels sing continually. In a word, wherever God hath a tongue to command, true godliness will find an hand to perform; whatever yoke Christ Jesus shall put upon the soul, religion will enable to bear it, yea, and to count it easy too; the mouth of Christ hath pronounced it easy, *Matt.* xi. 30. and the Spirit of Christ makes it easy. Let the commandment be what it will, it will not be grievous, 1 *John* v. 3. The same spirit doth, in some measure, dwell in every christian, which without measure, dwealt in Christ, who counted it his meat and drink to do the will of his Father, *John* iv. 34.

2. And more especially, the true christian is free from any constraint as to the inward acts which he performeth. Holy love to God is one principal act of the gracious soul, whereby it is carried out freely, and with an ardent love towards the object that is truly and infinitely lovely and satisfactory, and to the enjoyment of it. I know, indeed, that this springs from self-indigency, and is commanded by the sovereignity of the supreme good, the object that the soul eyes: but it is properly free from any constraint.—Love is an affection that cannot be extorted as fear is; nor forced by any external power, nor indeed internal neither: the revenues of the king of Persia, or the treasures of Egypt, cannot commit a rape upon it, *Heb.* xi. 26. neither indeed can the soul itself raise and lay this spirit at pleasure; which made the poet complain of himself, as if he were not sole emperor at home,

Non amo te Sabidi; nec possum dicere quare, &c.

Though the outward bodily acts of religion are ordinarily forced, yet this pure, chaste, virgin affection cannot be ravished; it seems to be a kind of a peculiar in the soul, though under the jurisdiction of the understanding. By this

Digitized by Google

property of it, it is elegantly described by the Spirit of God, *Cant.* viii. 7. *If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.* It cannot be bought with money, or money-worth, cannot be purchased with gifts or arts; and if any should offer to bribe it, it would give him a sharp and scornful check in the language of Peter to Simon, *Thy money perish with thee*; love is no hireling, no base-born mercenary affection, but noble, free, and generous. Neither is it low-spirited and slavish, as fear is: therefore, when it comes to full age, it will not suffer this son of the bond-woman to divide the inheritance, the dominions of the soul with it; when it comes to be *perfect, it casteth out fear*, says the apostle, 1 John iv. 18. Neither indeed is it directly under the authority of any law, whether human or divine; it is not begotten by the influence of a divine law, as a law, but has holy, just, and good, as we shall see more anon: *Quis legem dat amantibus? ipse est sibi lex amor:* the law of love; or, if you will, in the apostle's phrase, *the spirit of love, and of power*, in opposition to the spirit of fear, 2 *Tim.* i. 7. doth more influence the godly man in his pursuit of God that any law without him: this is as a wing to the soul; whereas outward commandments are but as guides in his way, or, at most, but as spurs in his sides.

The same I may say of holy delight in God, which is indeed the flower of love, or love grown up to its full age and stature, which hath no torment in it, and consequently no force upon it. Like unto which are holy confidence, faith, and hope, ingenuous and natural acts of the religious soul, whereby it hastens into the divine embraces, *as the eagle hasteneth to the prey*, swiftly and speedily, and not by force and constraint, *as a fool to the correction of the stocks*, or a bear to the stake. These are all genuine offsprings of holy religion in the soul, and they are utterly incapable of force; violence is contrary to the nature of them; for to use the apostle's words, with the change of one word, *Hope that is forced, is not hope.*

Digitized by Google

Now a little farther to explain this excellent property of true religion, we may a little consider the author, and the object of it.

The author of this noble and free principle is God himself, who hath made it a partaker of his own nature, who is the free agent; himself is the fountain of his own acts. The uncreated life and liberty hath given this privilege to the religious soul, in some sense, to have life and liberty in itself, and a dominion over its own acts. I do not know that any created being in the world hath more of divinity in it than the soul of man, *Quia nihil hominis dedit Deus ipse divinus*, as Tully speaks; nor that any thing in the soul doth more resemble the divine essence, than the noble freedom that the soul hath in itself; which freedom is never so divine and generous, as when it has God himself for its object. This excellent freedom is something of God in the soul of man, and therefore may justly claim the free spirit for its author, *Ps.* li. 12. 2 *Cor.* iii. 17. or the Son of God for its original, according to that in *John* viii. 36. *If the Son shall make you free, then shall ye be free indeed.*

But here it may be demanded, whether the command of God doth not act the godly soul, and set it upon its holy motions? I confess indeed that the command of God is much eyed by a godly man, and is of great weight with him, and does in some sense lay a constraint upon him; but yet I think not so much the authority of the law, as the reasonableness and goodness of it, does prevail principally with him. The religious soul does not so much eye the law under the notion of a command, as under the notion of holy, just and good, as the apostle speaks, and so embraces it, chooses it, and longs to be perfectly conformable to it. I do not think it so proper to say that a good man loves God and all righteousness and holiness, and religious duties, by virtue of a command to do so, as by virtue of a new nature that God hath put into him, which doth instruct and prompt him so to do. A religious soul being reconciled to the nature of God, does embrace all his laws by virtue of the equitableness and perfection

Digitized by Google

that he sees in them; not because they are commanded, but because they are in themselves to be desired, as David speaks, *Ps.* xix. 10. In which psalm the holy man gives us a full account why he did so love and esteem the laws and commandments of God, namely, because they are perfect, right, pure, clean, true, sweet, and lovely, as you will find *ver.* 7—10. To love the Lord our God with all our heart, and strength, and mind, is not only a duty, by virtue of that first and great commandment that doth require it; but indeed the highest privilege, honour, and happiness of the soul. To this purpose may that profession of the psalmist's be applied, *Ps.* cxix. 173. *I have chosen thy precepts;* and *ver.* 30. *I have chosen the way of truth.* Choosing is an act of judgment and understanding, and respects the quality of the thing, more than the authority of the command.—David did not stumble into the way of truth accidentally, by virtue of his education, or acquaintance, or the like circumstance; nor was he lashed or driven into it by the mere severity of a law without him; but he chose the way of truth as that which was indeed most eligible, pleasant, and desirable. What our blessed Saviour says concerning himself, is also true of every true christian in his measure; he makes it his meat and drink to do the will of God. Now, we know that men do not eat and drink because physicians prescribe it as a means to preserve life; but the sensual appetite is carried out towards food, because it is good, sweet, and suitable: and so the spiritual appetite is carried out towards spiritual food, not so much by the force of an external precept, as by the attractive power of that higher good which it finds suitable and sufficient for it. As for the object of this free and generous spirit of religion, it is no other than God himself principally and ultimately, and other things only as they are subservient to the enjoyment of him. God, as the supreme good, able to fill, and perfectly satisfy all the wants and indigencies of the soul, and so to make it wholly and eternally happy, is the proper object of the soul's most free and cheerful motions. The soul

Digitized by Google

eyes God as the perfect and absolute good, and God in Christ as an attainable good, and so finds every way enough in this object, to encourage it to pursue after him, and throw himself upon him. Religion fixes upon God, as upon its own centre, as upon its proper and adequate object; it views God as the infinite and absolute good, and so is drawn to him without any external force. The godly soul is overpowered indeed, but it is only with the infinite goodness of God, which exercises its sovereignty over all the faculties of the soul; which overpowering is so far from straitning or pinching it, that it makes it truly free and generous in its motions. Religion wings the soul, and makes it take a flight freely and swiftly towards God and eternal life: it is of God, and by a sympathy that it hath with him, it carries the soul out after him, and into conjunction with him. In a word, the godly soul being loosed from self-love, emptied of self-fulness, beaten out of all self-satisfaction, and delivered from all self-confining lusts, wills, interests, and ends, and being mightily over-come with a sense of a higher and more excellent good, goes after that freely, centres upon it firmly, grasps after it continually, and had rather be that than what itself is, as seeing that the nature of that supreme good is infinitely more excellent and desirable than its own.

Thus have I briefly explained and confirmed the freeness of this principle in the truly godly soul: I would now make some little improvement of it, but that it seems needful I should here interweave a cautionary concession or two.

1*st*, It must be granted, that some things without the soul may be motives, in our common sense, and encouragements to the soul to quicken, and hasten, and strengthen it in its religious acts. Though grace be an internal principle and most free from any constraint, yet it may be excited, or stirred up, as the apostle speaks, *2 Tim.* i. 6. by such means as God hath appointed hereunto, as prayer, meditation, reading, as the apostle intimates in the body of that fore-quoted epistle. But perhaps there will a question arise concerning some other things, which may seem to lay a

Digitized by Google

constraint upon the spirits of men. I deny not but that the seemingly religious motions of many men are merely violent, and their devotion is purely forced, as we shall see by and by: but I affirm, and I think have confirmed it, that true and sincere religion is perfectly free and unconstrained.—This being premised, now, if you ask me, what I think of afflictions: I confess God doth ordinarily use them as means to make good men better, and it may be sometimes to make bad men good; these may be as weights to hasten and speed the soul's motions towards God, but they do not principally beget such motions. If you ask me of temporal prosperity, commonly called mercies and blessings, of promises and rewards propounded; I confess they may be as oil to the wheels, and ought to quicken and encourage to the study of true and powerful godliness; but they are not the spring of the soul's motion; they ought to be unto us, as dew upon the grass to refresh and fructify the soul; but it is the root which properly gives life and growth.

2ly, It may be granted, that there is a kind of constraint and necessity lying upon the godly soul in its holy and most excellent motions; according to that of the apostle, 2 *Cor.* v. 14. *The love of Christ constraineth us;* and again, 1 *Cor.* ix. 16. *Necessity is laid upon me* to preach the gospel. But yet it holds good, that grace is a most free principle in the soul, and that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. For the constraint that the apostle speaks of is not opposed to freedom of soul, but to not acting; now, although the soul, so principled and spirited, cannot but act, yet it acts freely. Those things that are according to nature, though they be done necessarily, yet are they done with the greatest freedom imaginable. The water flows, and the fire burns necessarily, yet freely. Religion is a new nature in the soul; and the religious soul being touched effectually with the sense, and impressed with the influences of divine goodness, fulness, and perfection, is carried indeed necessarily towards God, as its proper centre, and yet its motions are pure, free, generous

Digitized by Google

and with the greatest delight and pleasure conceivable.—The necessity that lay upon Paul to preach the gospel is not to be understood of any external violence that was done to him, much less of bodily necessity, by reason of which many men serve their own bellies in that great function, more than the Lord Jesus; for though he preached the gospel necessarily, yet did he preach freely and willingly, as he often professeth. The godly man cannot but love God as his chiefest good, yet he delights in this necessity under which he lieth, and is exceeding glad that he finds his heart framed and enlarged to love him. I say enlarged, because God is such an object, as does not contract and pinch and straiten the soul, as all created objects do, but ennoble, ampliate, and enlarge it. The sinful soul, the more it lets out, and spends itself upon the creature, the more it is straitened and contracted, and the native freedom of it is enslaved, debased, and destroyed? but grace does establish and ennoble the freedom of the soul, and restore it to its primitive perfection; so that a godly soul is never more at large, more at rest, more at liberty, than when it finds itself delivered from all self-confining creature-loves and lusts, and under the most powerful influences and constraint of infinite love and goodness.

By this that hath been said of the free and generous spirit of true religion, we may learn what to think of the forced devotion of many pressed soldiers of Christ in his church militant; that there is a vast difference and distance between the pressed and unpressed christian. Though indeed the freedom of the will cannot be destroyed, yet, in opposition to a principle, many men's devotion may be said to be wrung out of them, and their obedience may be said to be constrained. I shall explain it briefly in two or three particulars.

1. Men force themselves, many times, to some things in religion that are besides, yea, and against their nature and genius. I need not instance in a slight conformity to the letter of the law, and some external duties which they

Digitized by Google

force themselves to perform, as to hear, pray, give alms, or the like: in all which the violent and unnatural obedience of a pharisee may be more popular and specious, than the true and genuine obedience of a free-born disciple of Jesus Christ. If going on hunting, and catching of venison might denominate a good and dutiful son, Esau may indeed be as acceptable to his father as Jacob; but God is not such a father as Isaac, whose affections were bribed with fat morsels; he feeds not upon the pains of his children, nor drinks the sweat of their brows. I doubt not but that an unprincipled christian, that hath the heart of a slave, may also force himself to imitate the more spiritual part of religion, and, as it were, to act over the very temper and disposition of a son of God. Therefore we read of a semblance of joy and zeal which was found in some, whom yet our Saviour reckons no better than *stony ground*, Mark. iv. 16. and of great extasies in some, whom yet the apostle supposes may come to nothing, *Heb.* vi. 5. and what appearance of the most excellent and divine graces of patience and contempt of the world, many of the sourer sort of monastical papists, and our mungrel breed of papists, the quakers, do make at this day, all men know: nay, some of these last sort do seem to themselves, I believe, to act over the temper and experience of the chiefest apostles, rejoicing with Peter, and the rest, that they are *counted worthy to suffer shame*, Acts v. 41. and keeping a catalogue of their stripes with Paul, 2 *Cor.* xi. 24. and in these things I am confident, to use the apostle's words, that they think themselves *not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles:* nay, they are not ashamed to lay claim to that grace of graces self-denial, which they have forced themselves to act over so artificially, that even a wise man might almost be deceived into a favourable opinion of them, but that we know that whilst they profess it they destroy it; for it is contrary to the nature of self-denial, to magnify and boast itself; and indeed it is very evident to a wise observer, that these men, by a pretence of voluntary humility, and counterfeit self-

Digitized by Google

denial, do, in truth, endeavour most of all to establish their own righteousness, and erect an idol of self-supremacy in themselves, and do really fall in love with self-sufficiency, instead of the infinite fulness of God.

Now there seem to be three things in a formal hypocrite that do especially force a kind of devotion, and shew of religion from him, namely, conscience of guilt, and false apprehensions of God. *1st*, There is in all men a natural conscience of guilt, arising from that imperfect and glimmering light they have of God, and of their duty towards him; which, though it be in some men more quick and stinging, in others more remiss and languid, yet, I think, is not utterly extinguished and choked, no not in the worst and most dissolute men, but that it doth sometimes beget a bitter sadness in the midst of their sweetest merriments, and doth disturb their most supine and secure rest, by fastening its stings in their very souls at some time or other, and filling them with agonies and anguish, and haunting them with dreadful apparitions, which they cannot be perfectly rid of, no more than they can run away from themselves. This foundation of hell is laid in the bowels of sin itself, as a preface to eternal horror. Now, although some more profligate and desperate wretches do furiously bluster through these briers, yet others are so caught in them, that they cannot escape these pangs and throws, except they make a composition, and enter into terms to live more honestly, or at least, less scandalously. In which undertaking they are carried on in the second place, by the power of self-love, or a natural desire of self-preservation: for the worst of men hath so much reason left him, that he could wish that himself were happy, though we have not so much light as to discover, nor so much true freedom of will as to choose, the right way to happiness. Conscience having discovered the certain reward and wages of sin, self-love will easily prompt men to do something or other to escape it. But now, what shall they do? why, religion is the only expedient that can be found out; and therefore

Digitized by Google

they begin to think how they may become friends with God; they will up and be doing. But how come they to run into so great a mistake about religion? why, their false and gross apprehensions of God, in the third place, do drive them from him, in the way of superstition and hypocrisy, instead of leading them in the way of sincere love, and self-resignation to him. Self being the great Diana of every natural man, and the only standard by which he measures all things, he knows not how to judge of God himself, but by this; and so he comes to fancy God in a dreadful manner, as an austere, passionate, surly, revengeful majesty, and so something must be done to appease him: but yet he fancies this angry deity to be of an impotent, mercenary temper like himself, and not hard to be appeased neither; and so imagines that some cheap services, specious oblations, external courtesies, will engage him, and make him a friend; a sheep, or a goat, or a bullock, under the Old Testament; a prayer, or a sacrament, or an alms, under the New: for it is reconciliation to an angry God that he aims at, not union with a good God; he seeks to be reconciled to God, not united to him, though indeed these two can never be divided. Thus we see how a man void of the life and spirit of religion, yet forces himself to do God a kind of worship, and pay him a kind of homage.

2dly, Sometimes men may be said, in a sense, to be forced by other men, to put on a vizard of holiness, a dress of religion. And this constraint men may lay upon men by their tongues, hands, and eyes. By their tongues, in the business of education, often and ardent exhortation and inculcation of things divine and heavenly: and thus an unjust man, like the unjust judge in the gospel, though he fear not God sincerely, yet may be overcome by the importunity of his father, friend, minister, tutor, to do some righteous acts. This seems to have been the case of Joash king of Judah, the spring-head of whose religion was no higher than the instructions of his tutor and guardian Jehoiada the high-priest, 2 *Kings* xii. 2. By their hand;

Digitized by Google

that is, either by the enacting and executing of penal laws upon them, or by the holy example which they continually set before them, *exempla trahunt*. By their eyes; that is, by continual observing and watching their behaviour; when many eyes are upon men, they must do something to satisfy the expectations of others, and purchase a reputation to themselves. It may be said, that sometimes God doth lay an external force upon men; as particularly by his severe judgments, or threatnings of judgments, awakening them, humbling them, and constraining them to some kind of worship and religion. Such a forced devotion as this was the humiliation of Ahab, 1 *Kings* xxi. 27. and the supplication of Saul, 1 *Sam.* xiii. 11, 12. For God himself acting upon men, only from without them, is far from producing a living principle of free and noble religion in the soul.

Now, the better to discern this forced and violent religion, I will briefly describe it by three or four of its properties, with which I will shut up this point.

1. This forced religion is, for the most part, dry and spiritless. I know, indeed, that fancy may be screwed up to a high pitch of joy and transport, so as to raise the mind into a kind of rapture, as I have formerly hinted in my discourse upon these words. A mere artificial and counterfeit christian may be so strongly acted by imagination, and the power of self-love, that he may seem to himself to be fuller of God than the sober and constant soul. You may see how the hypocritical pharisees, swollen with self-conceit, gloried over the poor man that had been blind, but now saw more than all they; *John* ix. 34. *Thou wast altogether born in sin, and dost thou teach us?* and indeed over the whole people, *John* vii. 49. *This people that knoweth not the law is cursed.* A counterfeit christian may rise high as a meteor, and blaze much as a comet, which is yet drawn up by mere force from the surface of the earth or water. And as to the external and visible acts and duties of religion, which depend much upon the temper and consitution of

Digitized by Google

the body, it may easily be conceived and accounted, how the mimical and mechanical christian may rise higher in these, and be more zealous, watchful, and cheerful, than many truly religious and godly men, as having greater power and quickness of fancy, and a greater number of animal spirits; upon which the motions and actions of the body do mainly depend. The animal spirits may so nimbly serve the soul in the corporal acts, that the whole transaction may be a fair imitation of the motions of the divine Spirit, and one would verily think there were a gracious principle in the soul itself. This seems to be notably exemplified in captain Jehu, whose religious actions as he would fain have them to be esteemed, 2 *Kings* x. 16. were indeed rather fury than zeal, and proceeded more from his own fiery spirits, than from the spirit of fire, or spirit of burning, which is of God, *Is.* iv. 4. But commonly this forced devotion is jejune and dry, void of zeal and warmth, and drives on heavily in pursuit of the God of Israel, as Pharaoh did in pursuit of the Israel of God, when his chariot-wheels were taken off, *Exod.* xiv. 25. God's drawing the soul from within, as a principle, doth indeed cause that soul to run after him, *Cant.* i. 4. but you know the motion of those things that are drawn by external force is commonly heavy, slow, and languid.

2. This forced religion is penurious and needy. Something the slavish-spirited christian must do to appease an angry God, or to allay a storming conscience, as I hinted before; but it shall be as little as may be. He is ready to grudge God so much of his time and strength, and to find fault that sabbaths come so thick, and last so long, and that duties are to be performed so often: so he is described by the prophet, *Amos* viii. 5. *When will the sabbath be past, and the new moon gone?* But yet I will not deny, but that this kind of religion may be very liberal and expensive too, and run out much into the branches of external duties, as is the manner of many trees that bear no fruit; for so did the base spirit of the pharisees, whose often fast-

Digitized by Google

ing, and long praying, is recorded by our Saviour in the gospel, but not with approbation. Therefore these are not the things by which you must take measure, and make estimate of your religion. But in the great things of the law, in the grand duties of mortification, self-denial, and resignation; here this forced religion is always very stingy and penurious. In the duties that do nearly touch upon their beloved lusts, they will be as strict with God as may be, they will break with him for a small matter: God must have no more than his due, as they blasphemously phrase it in their hearts; with the slothful servant in the gospel, *Lo, there thou hast that is thine;* self and the world sure may be allowed the rest. They will not part with all for Christ, *Matt.* xix. 22. is it not a little one? let me escape thither, and take up my abode there, said Lot, *Gen.* xix. 20. They will not give up themselves entirely unto God; *the Lord pardon me in this one thing*, cries *Naaman;* so they, in this or that, let God hold me excused. The slavish-spirited christian is never more shrunk up within himself, than when he is to converse with God indeed: but the godly soul is never freer, larger, gladder, than when he doth most intimately and familiarly converse with God. The soul that is free as to liberty, is free also as to liberality and expences; and that not only in external, but internal and spiritual obedience, and compliance with the will of God: he gives himself wholly up to God, knows no interest of his own, keeps no reserve for himself, or for the creature.

3. This forced religion is uneven, as depending upon inconstant causes. As land-floods, that have no spring within themselves, vary their motions, are swift and slow, high and low, according as they are supplied with rain; even so these men's motions in religion, depending upon fancy for the most part, than which nothing is more fickle and flitting, have no constancy nor consistency in them.—I know indeed, that the spirits of the best men cannot always keep one pace, nor their lives be always of one piece;

Digitized by Google

bnt yet they are never willingly quite out of the call or compass of religion. But this I also touched upon formerly. Therefore,

4. This forced religion is not permanent. The meteors will down again, and be choked in the earth whence they arose. Take away the weight, and the motion ceases; take away Jehoiada, and Joash stands still, yea runs backward. But this I shall speak more unto, when I come to speak of the last property of religion, *viz.* its perseverance.

CHAP. IV.

The active and vigorous nature of true religion proved by many scriptural phrases of the most powerful importance: more particularly explained in three things; 1st, In the soul's continual care and study to be good. 2dly, In its care to do good. 3dly, In its powerful and incessant longings after the most full enjoyment of God. In all which the causes and reasons of the same are either more obscurely intimated, or openly assigned.

I COME now to the second property of true religion, which is to be found in this phrase, *springing up,* or leaping up; wherein the activity and vigorousness of it is described. Religion, though it be compared to water, yet is no standing pool of water, but *a well of water* springing up. And here the proposition that I shall go upon, is, "That true religion is active and vigorous." It is no lazy and languid thing, but full of life and power: so I find it every where described in scripture, by things that are most active, lively, vigorous, operative, spreading, powerful, and sometimes even by motion itself. As sin is, in scriptures, described by death and darkness, which are a cessation and privation of life, and light, and motion: so religion is described by life, which is active and vigorous; by an angelical life, which is spiritual and powerful; yea, a divine life,

Digitized by Google

Eph. iv. 18. which is, as I may say, most lively and vivacious. *Christ liveth in me,* Gal. ii. 20. and the production of this new nature in the soul is called a quickening, *Eph.* ii. 1. and the reception of it *a passing from death unto life,* John v. 24. Again, as sin and wickedness are described by flesh, which is sluggish and unactive, so this holy principle in the soul is called Spirit, *Gal.* v. 17. *The Spirit lusteth against the flesh;* yea, the *Spirit of power,* 2 Tim. i. 7. and the *Spirit of life, Rom.* viii. 2. *The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.* How can the power and activity of any principle be more commended, than by saying it is life, and the *Spirit of life,* and *the law of the Spirit of life* in the soul? which hath made me sometimes to apply those words of the prophet, as a description of every godly soul *Micah* iii. 8. *I am full of power and might by the Spirit of the Lord.*

Yea, further, the holy apostle seems to describe a godly principle in the soul by activity and motion itself, *Phil.* iii. 12, 13, 14. where he gives this excellent character of himself, and this lively description of his religious disposition, as if it were nothing else but activity and fervour; I follow after, that I apprehend; I forget those things that are behind, and reach forth unto those things that are before; I press towards the mark, &c. It were too much to comment upon those phrases of like importance, *labouring, seeking, striving, fighting, running, wrestling, panting, longing, hungering, thirsting, watching,* and many others, which the Holy Ghost makes use of up and down the scriptures, to express the active, industrious, vigorous, diligent, and powerful nature of this divine principle, which God hath put into the souls of his elect. The streams of divine grace, which flow forth from the throne of God, and of the Lamb, into the souls of men, do not cleanse them, and so pass away, like some violent land flood, that washes the fields and meadows, and so leaves them to contract as much filth as ever; but the same becomes a *well of water,* continually springing up, boiling, and bubbling, and work-

Digitized by Google

ing in the soul, and sending out fresh rivers, as our Saviour calls them, *John* vii. 38. *Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

But more particularly, to unfold the active nature of this divine principle in the soul, we shall consider it in these three particulars, *viz.* as it is still conforming to God, doing for him, and longing after him.

1. The active and sprightly nature of true godliness, or religion planted by God in the soul, appears and shews itself in a continued care and study to be good, to conform more and more to the nature of the blessed God, the glorious pattern of all perfection. The nature of God being infinitely and absolutely perfect, is the only rule of perfection to the creature. If we speak of goodness, our Saviour tells us, that God alone is good, *Luke* xviii. 19. of wisdom, the apostle tells us, that God is only wise, 1 *Tim.* i. 17. of power, he is omnipotent, *Rev.* xix. 6. of mercy and kindness, he is love itself, 1 *John* iv. 8. Men are only good by way of participation from God, and in a way of assimilation to him: so that, though good men may be imitated, and followed, yet it must be with a *quatenus*, with this limitation, as far forth as they are followers of God: the great apostle durst not press his example any further, 1 *Cor.* xi. 1. *Be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ.* But the nature of God being infinitely and absolutely perfect, is to be eyed and imitated singly, entirely, universally, in all things wherein the creature is capable of following him, and becoming like unto him. So christians are required to look up unto the Father of lights, the fountain of all perfections, and to take from him the pattern of their dispositions, and conversations, to eye him continually, and eying him, to derive an image of him, not into their eye, as we do by sensible objects, but into their soul, to polish and frame them into the most clear and lively resemblances of him; that is, in the language of the scripture, to be *perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect*, Matt. v. 44, 45—48. to be *holy as God is holy*, 1 Pet. i. 16.

Digitized by Google

And thus the genuine children of God are described by the Holy Ghost, *Eph.* v. 1. they are *followers of God.* This is the shortest, but the surest, and clearest mark that can be given of a good man, *a follower of God:* they are not owned for the children of God, who are created by him, nor they who have a notional knowledge of him, who profess him, or exhibit some external worship, and service to him in the world, but they that imitate him: the true children of Abraham were not those that were descended from him, or boasted of him, but they that did the works of Abraham, *John* viii. 39. even so are they only the offspring of heaven, the true and dear children of the living God, who are followers of him: *be ye followers of God as dear children.*

A godly soul having its eyes opened to behold the infinite beauty, purity, and perfection, of that good God whose nature is the very fountain, and must needs then be the rule of all goodness, presently comes to undervalue all created excellencies, both in itself and all the world besides, as to any satisfaction that is to be had in them, or any perfection that can be acquired by them, and cannot endure to take up with any lower good, or live by any lower rule than God himself. A godly man having the unclean and rebellious spirit cast out, and being once reconciled to the nature of God, is daily labouring to be more intimately united thereunto, and to be all that which God is, as far as he is capable, the nature of God being infinitely more pure and perfect, and more desirable than his own. Religion is a participation of life from him, who is life itself, and so must needs be an active principle spreading itself in the soul, and causing the soul to spread itself in God: and therefore the kingdom of heaven, which in many places of the gospel I take to be nothing else but this divine principle in the soul, which is both the truest heaven, and most properly a kingdom (for thereby God doth most powerfully reign and exercise his sovereignty, and most excellently display and manifest his glory in the world) is compared to *seed sown*

Digitized by Google

in the ground, which both springeth up into a blade, and bringeth forth fruit; to mustard-seed, which spreadeth itself, and groweth great, so that the birds of the air may lodge in the branches thereof; to leaven, spreading itself through the whole quantity of meal, and leavening the whole, and all the parts of it, *Matt.* xiii. 23—31—33.

By a like similitude, the path of the just is compared to a shining light, whose glory and lustre increased continually, *shining more and more until the perfect day*, Prov. iv. 18. which continual growing up of the holy soul into God, is excellently described by the apostle in an elegant metaphor, 2 *Cor.* iii. 18. *We all, with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory*; that is, from one resemblance of divine glory to another. The gracious soul not being content with its present attainments, and having in its eye a perfect and absolute good, forgets that which is behind, and labours, prays, strives and studies, to get the perfections of God more clearly copied out upon itself, and itself as much as may be, swallowed up in the divinity. It covets earnestly these best things, to be perfected in grace and holiness, to have divine characters more fair and legible, divine impressions more deep and lively, divine life more strong and powerful, and the communicable image of the blessed God spread quite over it, and through it.

A godly soul is not content to receive of Chirst's fulness, but labours to be filled with the fulness, with all the fulness of God; he rejoices indeed that he hath received of Christ grace for grace, as a child hath limb for limb with his father; but this his joy is not fulfilled, except he find himself adding daily some cubits to his infant-stature; nor indeed then neither, nor can it be, until he come to the measure of the stature of his Lord, and be grown up into him in all things who is the head, even Christ, *Eph.* iv. 15. He delights and glories in God, beholding his spices growing in his soul; but that does not satisfy him, except he may see them flowing out also, *Cant.* iv. 16. He is neither

Digitized by Google

barren nor unfruitful, as the apostle Peter speaks; but that is not enough, he desires to be fat and fruitful also, as a watered garden, as the prophet phrased it, even as the garden of God. The spirit lusteth against the flesh, and struggles with it in the same womb of the soul, as Jacob with Esau, until he had cast him out. The seed of God warreth continually against the seed of the serpent, raging and restless, like Jehu, shooting, and stabbing, and strangling all he meets with, till none at all remain of the family of that Ahab who had formerly been his master.

O how does the godly and devout soul long to have Christ's victory carried on in itself, to have Christ going on in him conquering and to conquer, till at length the very last enemy be subdued, that the Prince of Peace may ride triumphantly through all the coasts and regions of his heart and life, and not so much as a dog move his tongue against him! This holy principle which is of God in the soul, is actually industrious too; it doth not fold the arms together, hide its hand in his bosom, faint wishingly to obtain a final conquest over its enemies, but advances itself with a noble stoutness against lusts and passions, even as the sun glorieth against the darkness of the night, until it have chased it all away. The godly soul puts itself under the banner of Christ, fights under the conduct of the angel of God's presence, and so marches up undauntedly against the children of Anak, those earthly loves, lusts, sensual affections, which are indeed taller and stronger than all other enemies that do encounter it in this wilderness state: and the gracious God is not wanting to such endeavours, he *remembring his promise, helpeth his servants*, even that promise, *Isa.* xl. 31. that *they that wait upon the Lord, shall renew strength.* A true Israelitish soul, impregnated with this noble and heroic principle, is not like those slothful Israelites, that were content with what they had got of the holy land, and either could not, or cared not to enlarge their border, *Judges* i. But he makes war upon the remainder of the Canaanites, and is never at rest till he has, with

Digitized by Google

Sarah, cast out the bond-woman and her son too. You may see an emblem of such a soul in Moses holding up his hands all the day long, till Amalek was quite discomfited, *Exod.* xvii. 12. As often as the floods of temptation, springing from the devil, the world, or the flesh, do offer to come in upon him, he opposeth them in the strength of Christ; or, if you will, in the prophet's phrase, *Isa.* lix. 19. *The Spirit of the Lord lifteth up a standard against them;* so that he is now carried down by them, or, at least, not overwhelmed with them. In the beginning of my discourse upon this head, I hinted to you the reason why the godly soul continually studies conformity to God, even because he is the perfect and absolute good, and the soul reckons that its happiness consists only in being like unto him, in partaking of a divine nature. But I might also here take occasion to speak of three things, which I will but briefly name, and so pass on.

1*st*, A godly man reckons with himself, that conformity to the image and nature of God, is the most proper conversing with God in the world. The great, and indeed only employment of an immortal soul, is to converse with its Creator; for this end it was made, and made so capacious as we see it: now, to partake of a divine nature, to be endued with a god-like disposition, is most properly to converse with God; this is a real, powerful, practical, and feeling converse with him, infinitely to be preferred before all notions, professions, performances, or speculations.

2*dly*, A godly man reckons that the image of God is the glory and ornament of the soul; it is the lustre, and brightness, and beauty of the soul, as the soul is of the body. Holiness is not only the duty, but the highest honour and dignity that any created nature is capable of: and therefore the godly soul, who hath his senses exercised to discern good and evil, pursues after it, as after his full and proper perfection.

3*dly*, A godly man reckons, that conformity to the divine image, participation of the divine nature, is the surest

Digitized by Google

and most comfortable evidence of divine love, which is a matter of so great inquiry in the world. By growing up daily in Christ Jesus, we are infallibly assured of our implantation into him. The Spirit of God descending upon the soul in the impressions of meekness, kindness, uprightness, which is a dove-like disposition, is a better, and more desirable evidence of our sonship, and God's favour towards us, than if we had the Spirit descending upon our heads in a dove-like shape, as it did upon our blessed Saviour.—These things may pass for a kind of reasons, why the religious christian, above all things, labours to become godlike, to be formed more and more into a resemblance of the supreme good, and to drink in divine perfections into the very inmost of his soul.

2. The active and industrious nature of true godliness, or religion, manifests itself in a good man's continual care, and study to do good, to serve the interest of the holy and blessed God in the world. A good man being overpowered with the sense of the infinite goodness of God, and the great end of his life, cannot think it worth while to spend himself for any inferior good, or bestow his time and strength for any lower end than that is; and therefore, as it is the main happiness of his life to enjoy God, so he makes it the main business of this life to serve him, to be doing for him, to lay out himself for him, and to display, and propagate his glory in the world. And as he is ravished with the apprehensions of the supreme goodness, which doth infinitely deserve, and may justly challenge all that he can do or expend for him, so he doth indeed really partake of the active and communicative nature of that blessed being, and himself becomes active and communicative too: a godly soul sluggish and unactive, is as if one should say, a godly soul altogether unlike to God; a pure contradiction. I cannot dwell upon any of those particular designs of serving the interest of God's glory, which a good man is still driving on in the world: only this, in general, whether he pray, or preach, or read, or celebrate sabbaths, or administer pri-

Digitized by Google

vate reproof or instruction, or indeed plow, or sow, eat or drink, all this while he lives not to himself, but serves an higher interest than that of the flesh, and a higher good than himself, or any created being. A true christian activity doth not only appear in those things which we call duties of worship, or religious performances; but in the whole frame of the heart contriving, and the conversation expressing and unfolding the glory of God.

A holy, serious, heavenly, humble, sober, righteous, and self-denying course of life, does most excellently express the divine glory, by imitating the nature of God, and most effectually call all men to the imitation of it; according as our Saviour hath nakedly stated the case, *John* xv. 8. *Hereby is my Father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit:* by which fruit are not to be understood only preaching, praying, conference, which are indeed high and excellent duties; but also righteousness, temperance self-denial, which things are pure reflections of the divine image, and a real glorifying of God's name and perfections. A good christian cannot be content to be happy alone, to be still drawing down heaven into his own soul; but he endeavours also by prayer, counsel, and holy example, to draw up the souls of other men heaven-ward. This God witnesseth of Abraham, *Gen.* xviii. 19. *I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord:* And this Moses doth exceedingly witness of himself in that holy rapture of his, *Numb.* xi. 29. *Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!* By such examples as these a good man desires to live, yea, by higher precidents than either Abraham or Moses, even by the example of the Father and of the Son: he admires and strives to imitate that character which is given of God himself, *Ps.* cxix. 68. *Thou art good, and dost good:* and that which is given of Christ Jesus, the Lord of life, *Acts* x. 38. who *went about doing good:* who also witnessed elsewhere concerning himself, that he came not into the world to

Digitized by Google

do his own will, nor seek his own glory, but the will and glory of him that sent him: and again, *Luke* ii. 49. *Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?* O how happy would the godly soul count itself, if it could but live and converse in the world at the same rate, and with the same devout, fervent, exalted spirit, as Christ Jesus did, whose meat and drink it was still to be doing the will, and advancing the glory of his Father! But, alas! the poor soul finds itself ensnared by passions, and selfish affections from within, clogged with an unweildy body, and distracted with secular affairs from without, that it cannot rise so nimbly, run so swiftly, nor serve the infinite and glorious God so cheerfully, nor liberally, as it would; and therefore the poor prisoner sighs within itself, and wishes that it might escape: but finding a certain time determined upon it in the body, which it must be content to live out, it looks up, and is ready to envy the angels of God, because it cannot live as they do, who are always upon God's errand, and almost thinks much that itself is not a ministring spirit, serving the pure and perfect will of the supreme good, without grudging or ceasing. The godly soul, under these powerful apprehensions of the nature of God, the example of Christ, and the honourable office of the holy angels, is ready to grudge the body that attendance that it calls for, and those offices which it is forced to perform to it; as judging them impertinent to its main happiness, and most excellent employment; it is ready to envy that more cheerful and willing service, which it finds from the heavy and drossy body with which it is united; and to cry out, O that I were that to my God, which my body, my eyes, hands, and feet, are to me! for I say to one of these, *Go, and he goeth;* and to another, *Do this, and he doth it.* In a word, a good man being acquainted feelingly with the highest good, eying diligently the great end of his coming into the world, and his short time of being in it, serves the eternal and blessed God, lives upon eternal designs, and by consecrating all his actions unto God, gives a kind of an im-

Digitized by Google

mortality to them, which are in themselves flitting and transient: he counts it a reproach to any man, much more to a godly man, to do any thing insignificantly, much more to live impertinently; and he reckons all things that have not a tendency to the highest good, and a subserviency to the great and last end, to be impertinencies, yea, and absurdities in an immortal soul, which should continually be *springing up into everlasting life.*

3. The active and vigorous nature of true religion manifests itself in those powerful and incessant longings after God, with which it fills that soul in which it is implanted. This I superadd to the two former, because the godly man, though he be formed into some likeness to God, yet desires to be more like him; and though he be somewhat serviceable to him, yet desires to be more instrumental to his will: though he be good, yet he desires to be better; and though he do good, yet he desires to do better, or at least more. And, indeed, I reckon that these sincere and holy hungrings after God, which I am going to speak of, are one of the best signs that I know in the world of spiritual health, and the best mark of a true christian: for, in this low and animal state, we are better acquainted with lovings and languishings, than with fruition or satisfaction: and the best enjoyment that we have of God in this world is but scant and short, indeed but a kind of longing to enjoy him. Love is certainly a high and noble affection; but, alas! our love, whilst we are here in the body, is in its non-age, in its weak and sickly state, rather a longing than a loving, much unlike to what it will be when it shall be grown up unto its perfect stature in glory. But this sickly kind of languishing affection is a certain symptom of a healthful constitution; or, as the apostle calls it, of *the spirit of a sound mind.* Godly souls are thirsty souls, always gasping after the living springs of divine grace, even as the parched desart gapeth for the dew of heaven, the early and the latter rain. One would wonder what kind of magic there was in Elijah's mantle, that the very casting of it upon Elisha should make

Digitized by Google

him leave oxen and plough, yea, father and mother, and all to run after a stranger: Elijah himself seems to wonder at it, 1 *Kings* xix. 20. *What have I done to thee?* O but what a mighty charm is there in divine love! which when it is once shed abroad in the soul, makes the soul to spread itself in it and to it, as the heliotrope attending the motions of the sun, and turning itself every way towards it, welcoming its warm and refreshing beams. Elijah passing by Elisha as he was at plough, and catching him with his mantle, is but a scant resemblance of the blessed God passing by a carnal mind, and wrapping it in the mantle of his love, and thereby causing it to run, yea, to fly swiftly after him. If divine grace do but once touch the soul, the soul presently sticks to it, as the needle to the loadstone. They that heard Christ Jesus chiding the winds and the waves, cried out, *What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!* but if one had been present when he called James and John from their nets, Matthew from the custom-house, and Zaccheus from the tree, and by calling made them willing to come, he would have cried out, sure, what manner of God is this! that, by his bare word makes poor men leave their trades and livelihood, and rich men their gainful exactions, usuries, and oppressions, to follow him and shews them no reason why. What a mighty virtue is there in the ointment of Christ's name, that as soon as it is poured out, the virgins fall in love with him? *Cant.* i. 3. Micah cried out when he was in pursuit of his Gods, and, should they ask him what ailed him? And will ye wonder that a holy soul, in pursuit of the holy God, should be in earnest; that he should run, and cry as he runs? as I have seen a fond child whom the father or mother have endeavoured to leave behind them. God breathing into the soul, makes the soul breathe after him, and in a mixture of holy disdain and anger, to thrust away from itself all distracting companions, occasions, and concernments, saying with Ephraim to her idols, *Get ye hence.* The soul thus inspired is so far from prostituting itself to any earthly, sensual, sel-

Digitized by Google

fish lusts, and loves, that it cannot brook any thing that would weaken it in the prosecution of the highest good; it is impatient of every thing that would either stop or slacken its motions after God. The godly man desires still to be doing something for God indeed; but if the case so fall out, that he cannot spend his life for God as he desires, yet he will be spending his soul upon him: though he cannot perpetually abide upon the knee of prayer, yet he would be continually upon the wing of faith and love: when his tongue cleaves to the roof of his mouth, that he cannot speak for God, yet his soul shall cleave unto him, and complain because it can speak no longer: for faith and love are knitting graces, and do long to make the soul as much one with their object, as is possible for the creature to be with its Creator. Religion puts a restless appetite in the soul after a higher good, and makes it throw itself into his arms, and wind itself into his embraces, longing to be in a more intimate conjunction with him, or rather entirely wrapped up in him: itself is an insatiable and covetous principle in the soul, much like to the daughter of the horseleech, crying continually, *Give, give.* What the prophet speaks rhetorically of hell, *Isa.* v. 14. is also true concerning this offspring of heaven in the soul, *it enlargeth itself, and openeth its mouth without measure.* The spirit of true godliness seems to be altogether such that it cannot rest in any measures of grace, or be fully contented with any of its attainments in this life; but ardently longs to receive the more plentiful communications of love, the more deep and legible impressions of grace, the more clear and ample experiences of divine assistance, the more sensible evidences of divine favour, the more powerful and ravishing illapses and incomes of divine consolation into itself; *let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,* Cant. i. 2. Such is the spirit of true godliness, that the weakest that is endowed with it, longs to be as David, and the Davids to be as God, as the angel of the Lord, according to that promise, *Zech.* xii. 8. The godly soul, that is in his right senses under the power-

Digitized by Google

ful apprehensions of the loveliness of God, and the beauty of holiness, cannot be content to live by any lower instance than that of David, whose soul even broke for the longing that it had unto the Lord, *Ps.* cxix. 20. or that of the spouse who was even *sick of love,* Cant. ii. 5. You have read of the mother of Sisera looking out at the window, waiting for his coming, and crying through the lattess, *Why is his chariot so long in coming; why tarry the wheels of his chariot?* But this is not to be compared to the earnest expectation of the creature, the new creature, waiting for the manifestation of God; which the apostle elegantly expresseth and yet seems to labour for words, as if he could not sufficiently express it neither, *Rom.* viii. 19. You have read of the Israelites marching up towards the promised land, and murmuring that they were held so long in the wilderness: but the true Israelitish soul makes more haste with less discontent, marches as under the conduct of an angel of God's presence, and longs to arrive at its rest: but, alas! it is held in the wilderness too; and therefore cannot be fully quiet in itself, but sends forth spies to view the land, the scouts of faith and hope, like Caleb and Joshua, those men of another spirit; and these go and walk through the holy land, and return home to the soul, and come back, not as Noah's dove with an olive leaf in her mouth, but with some clusters in their hands, they bring the soul a taste of the good things of the kingdom of the glories of her eternal state: yea, the soul itself marches up to possess the land, goes out, with the spouse in the Canticles, to meet the Lord, to seek him whom her soul loveth. Religion is a sacred fire kept burning in the temple of the soul continually, which being once kindled from heaven, never goes out, but burns up heaven-wards, as the nature of fire is: this fire is kept alive in the soul to all eternity, though sometimes, through the ashes of earthly cares and concernments cast into it, or the sun of earthly prosperity shining upon it, it may sometimes burn more dimly, and seem almost as if it were quite smothered: this

Digitized by Google

fire is for sacrifice too, though sacrifice be not always offered upon it; the same fire of faith and love which offered up the morning sacrifice is kept alive all the day long, and is ready to kindle the evening sacrifice too, when the appointed time of it shall come. In this chariot of fire it is that the soul is continually carried out towards God, and accomplisheth a kind of glorification daily; and when it finds itself firmly seated and swiftly carried herein, it no longer envies the translation of Elias. The spirit of sanctification is in the soul as a burning fire shut up in the bones, which makes the soul weary with forbearing, and so powerful in longings that it cannot stay; as the spirit of prophecy is described, *Jer.* xx. It is more true of the Spirit of God than of the spirit of Elihu, the spirit within constraineth, and even presseth the soul, so that it is ready to swoon and faint away for very vehemence of longing. See the amorous spouse falling into one of these fainting fits, *Cant.* ii. 5. and crying out mainly for some cordial from heaven to keep up her sinking spirits, *Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am sick of love.* O beautiful and blessed sight, a soul working towards God, gasping, and longing, and labouring after its proper happiness and perfection! Well, the sinking soul is relieved; Christ Jesus reacheth forth his left hand to her head, and his right hand embraceth her; and now she recovers, her hanging hands lift up themselves, and the beauties of her fading complexion are restored; now she sits down *under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit is sweet unto her taste.* See here the fairest sight on this side heaven; a soul resting, and glorying, and spreading itself in the arms of God, growing great in him, growing full in his fulness and perfectly ravished with his pure love! O my soul, be not content to live by any lower instance? *Did not our hearts burn with in us,* said the two disciples one to the other, *whilst he talked with us?* But the soul in which the sacred fire of love is powerfully kindled, doth not only burn towards God, whilst he is more familiarly present with it, and, as it were, blows upon

Digitized by Google

it; but if he seem to withdraw from it, it burns after him still; *My beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone; I I sought him; I called him,* Cant. v. 6. And if the fire begin to languish, and seem as if it would go out the holy soul is startled presently, and labours as the apostle speaks, 2 *Tim.* i. 6. to revive it, and blow it up again, call upon itself to awake, to arise and pursue, to mend its pace, and to speed its heavy and sluggish motions. This divine active principle in the soul maintains a continual striving, a holy struggling and stretching forth of the soul towards God, a bold and ardent contention after the supreme good; religion hath the strength of the divinity in it, its motions towards its object are quick and potent. That elegant description which the prophet makes of the wicked heart, with some change, may be brought livelily to express this excellent temper of the godly soul; it is like the working sea which connot rest: and although its waters do not cast up mire and dirt, yet in a holy impatience, they rise and swell, and work and mount towards heaven. In a word, that I may comprise many things in few expressions, no man so ambitious as the humble, none so covetous as the heavenly-minded, none so voluptuous as the self-denying: religion gives a largeness and wideness to the soul, which sin, and self, and the world, had straitened and confined: but a saint's ambition is only to be great in God, his covetousness is only to be filled with all the fulness of God, and his voluptuousness is only to drink of the rivers of his pure pleasures: he desires to taste the God whom he sees, and to be satisfied with the God whom he tastes. O now, how are all the faculties of the soul awakened to attendance upon the Lord of life! It hearkens for the sound of his feet coming, the noise of his hands knocking at the door; it stands upon its watch-tower waiting for his appearing, waiting more earnestly than they that watch for the morning, and rejoices to meet him at his coming; and having met him, runs into his arms kisses him, holds him, and will not let him go, but brings him into the house, and entertains him in the

Digitized by Google

guest-chamber: the soul complains that itself is not large enough, that there is not room enough to entertain so glorious a guest, no not though it have given him all the room that it hath: it entertains him with the widest arms, and the sweetest smiles; and if he depart and withdrew, fetches him again with the deepest groans, return, return, O Prince of Peace, and make me an everlasting habitation of righteousness unto thyself!

It will not be amiss here briefly to touch upon the reason of the godly soul's so ardent pantings after God. And here I might shew first, negatively, that it springs not from any carnal ambition of being better and higher than others, not from any carnal hope of impunity and safety, nor merely from the bitter sense of pressing and tormenting afflictions in this life. But I shall rather insist upon it affirmatively. These earnest breathings after God spring from the feeling apprehensions of self-indigency and insufficiency, and the powerful sense of divine goodness and fulness; they are begotten of the divine bounty and self-sufficiency, manifesting itself to the spirits of men, and conceived and brought forth by a deep sense of self-poverty; one might almost apply the apostle's words to this purpose, 2 *Cor.* i. 9. *We receive the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in him.* I shall not discourse upon these two heads disjunctly, but frame them into one notion, and so you may take it thus; these holy longings of the godly soul after God, arise from the sense of its distance from God, who is life and love itself, and the proper and full happiness of the soul, is grievous to the soul that is rightly affected towards him: and hence it is that the soul cannot be at rest, but still longs to be more intimately joined to him, and more perfectly filled with him: and the clearer the soul's apprehensions are of its object, and the deeper its sense is of its own unlikeness to him, and distance from him, the more strong and impatient are its breathings; insomuch that not only fear, as the apostle speaks, but even love itself sometimes seems to itself to have a kind of agony and tor-

Digitized by Google

ment in itself; which made the spouse cry she was sick of love, that is, sick of every thing that kept her from her love, sick of that distance at which she stood from her beloved Lord. The godly soul being ravished with the infinite sweetness and goodness of God, longs to be that rather than what itself is, and beholding how it is estranged from him, by many sensual loves, selfish passions, corporal clogs, and distractions, bewails its distance, and cries out within itself, *O when shall I come and appear before God!* O when will God come and appear gloriously to me and in me! *Who will deliver me from this body of death!* O that mortality were swallowed up of life! David's soul did wait for God as earnestly, and more properly than they that watch for the morning; they may be said rather to be weary of the long, and cold, and troublesome night, than properly covetous of the day; but he, out of a pure and spiritual sense of his estrangement from God, longs to appear before him, and be wrapped up in him. Heal the godly man of all his afflictions, grievances, and adversities in the world, that he may have nothing to trouble him, nor put him to pain, yet he is not quiet, he is in pain because of the distance whereat he stands from God: give him the whole world, and all the glory of it, yet he has not enough; he still cries, and craves, *Give, give,* because he is not entirely swallowed up in God: he openeth his mouth wide, as the Psalmist speaks, and all the silver, and gold, peace, health, liberty, preferment, that you cast into it, cannot fill it; because they are not God, he cannot look upon them as his chiefest good. In a word, a godly man doth not so much say, in the sense either of sin or affliction, *O that one would give me the wings of a dove, that I might fly away, and be at rest!* as in the sense of his dissimilitude to, and distance from God, O that one would give me the wings of an eagle, that I might fly away towards heaven!

Digitized by Google

CHAP. V.

An expostulation with christians concerning their remiss and sluggish temper: an essay to convince them of it by some considerations; which are, 1. The activity of worldly men. 2. The restless appetites of the body. 3. The strong propensions of every creature towards its own centre. An inquiry into the slothfulness and inactivity of christian souls: two things premised, and so an answer is given to the inquiry in five particulars. The grace of faith is vindicated from the slander of being merely passive. A short essay to awaken christians unto a greater vigour and activity.

WE have seen in what respects religion is an active principle in the soul where it is seated: give me leave to enlarge a little here for conviction or reprehension. By this property of true religion we shall be able to discover much that is false and counterfeit in the world. If religion be no lazy, languid, sluggish, passive thing, but life, love, the spirit of power and freedom, a fire burning, a well of water springing up, as we have sufficiently seen, what shall we say then of that heavy, sluggish, spiritless kind of religion that most men take up with? Shall we call it a spirit of life, with the apostle; and yet allow of a religion that is cold and dead? Shall we call it a spirit of love and power, with the same apostle; and yet allow of it, though it be indifferent, low, and impotent? or will such pass for current with the wise and holy God, if we should pass a favourable censure upon it? And why should it ever pass with men, if it will not for ever pass with God? But, indeed, how can this inactivity and sluggishness pass for religion amongst men? Who can think you are in pursuit of the infinite and supreme good, that sees you so slow in your motions towards it? Who can think that your treasure is in heaven, that sees your heart so far from thence? The more any

Digitized by Google

thing partakes of God, and the nearer it comes to him who is the fountain of life, and power, and virtue, the more active, powerful, and lively will it be. We read of an atheistical generation in *Zeph.* i. 12. who fancied to themselves an idle and slothful God, that minded not the affairs of the world at all, saying, *The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil;* which was also the false and gross conceit of many of the heathen, as Cicero confesses of some of the Philosophers themselves, *Qui Deum nihil habero negotii dicunt et nihil exhibere alteri:* and indeed, though it be not so blasphemous, yet it is almost as absurd, to fancy an idle saint, as an idle deity. Sure I am, if it be not altogether impossible, yet it is altogether a shameful and deformed sight, a holy soul in a lethargy, a godly soul that is not in pursuit of God. Moses indeed bids *Israel stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord;* but there is no such divinity in the holy scriptures as this, stand still and see the salvation of the soul, though some have violently pressed those words, *Exod.* xiv. 13. to serve under their slothful standard: no, no, the scripture speaks to us at another rate, *Phil.* ii. 12. *work out your own salvation:* and indeed the Spirit of God doth every where describe religion by the activity, industry, vigour, and quickness of it, as I hinted in the very beginning of this discourse, and could abundantly confirm and explain if there where need of it.

But that I may more powerfully convince and awaken the lazy and heavy spirit and temper of many professors, I will briefly touch upon a few particulars, which I will next propound to their serious consideration.

1. The children of this world, earthly and sensual men, are not so slothful, so lazy, so indifferent in the pursuit of earthly and sensual objects. You say you have laid up your treausure in heaven; we know they have laid up their treasure in the earth: now, who is it that behaves himself most suitably and seemly towards his treasure? you or they? You say you have a treasure in heaven, and are content to be able to say so, but make no haste to be fully and feel-

Digitized by Google

ingly possessed of it, to enjoy the benefit and sweetness of it. But they *rise up early and sit up late*, and either pine themselves, or eat the bread of sorrow, to obtain earthly and perishing inheritances; they circuit the world, travel far, sell all to purchase that part which is of so great price with them: and when they have accomplished it, O how do they set their heart upon it, bind up their very souls in the same bags with their money, and seal up their affections together with it: yea, and so they are not at rest neither, but find a gnawing hunger upon their hearts after more still, to add house to house, and land to land, and one bag to another; the covetous miser is ready to sit down and wring his hands, because he hath no more hands to scrape with; the voluptuous Epicure is angry that he hath not the neck of a crane the better to taste his dainties; and ambitious Alexander, when he domineers over the known world, is ready to sit down and whine, because there are no more worlds to conquer. What chistian can choose but be ashamed of himself, when he reads the description which Plautus the comedian gives of a covetous worldling, under the character of Euclio, how he hid his pot of gold, heeded it, watched it, visited it almost every hour, would not go from it in the day, could not sleep for it in the night, suspected every body that so much as looked towards it, and by all means kept it even as his life? For where is the like eager and ardent disposition to be found in a christian towards God himself? Tell me, is it possible for a man that vehemently loves a virgin, to be content all his life long to court her at a distance, and not care whether ever he do actually enjoy her or no? or must not such an one necessarily pursue a matrimonial and most intimate union with her? Let us now confess the truth, and every one judge himself.

2. This dull and earthly body is not so indifferently affected towards meat and drink, and rest, and the things that do serve its necessities, and gratify its temper. Hunger will break down stone walls, and thirst will give away a kingdom for a cup of water; sickness will not be eased by

Digitized by Google

good words, nor will a drowsy brain be bribed by any entertainments of company or recreation; no, no, the necessities of the body must and will be relieved with food, and physic, and sleep; the restless and raging appetite will never cease calling and crying to the soul for supplies till it arise and give them. Behold, O my soul! consider the mighty and incessant appetites and tendencies of the body after sensual objects, after its suitable good and proper perfection, and be ashamed of thy more remiss and sluggish inclinations towards the highest good, a god-like perfection!

3. No creature in the whole world is so languid, slow, and indifferent in its motions towards its proper rest and centre. How easy were it to call heaven and earth to witness the free, pleasant, cheerful, eager addresses of every creature according to its kind, towards its own centre and happiness? The sun in the firmament rejoices to run its race, and will not stand still one moment, except it be miraculously overpowered by the command of God himself; the rivers seem to be in pain, till by a continued flowing they have accomplished to themselves a kind of perfection, and be swallowed up in the bosom of the ocean, except they be benumbed with cold, or otherwise overmostered and retarded by foreign violence; I need not instance in sensitives and vegetatives; all which you know with a natural vigour and activity grow up daily towards a perfect state and stature. Were it not a strange and montrous sight to see a stone setting in the air, and not working towards its centre? Such a spectacle is a godly soul settling upon earth, and not endeavouring a nearer and more intimate union with its God. Wherefore, christians, either cease to pretend that you have chosen God for your portion, centre, happiness, or else arise and cease not to pursue and accomplish the closest union and the most familiar conjunction with him that your souls are capable of: otherwise I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: and the day is coming, when you will be put to shame by the whole creation. Doth every, even the meanest creature of God, pursue its end

Digitized by Google

and perfection, and proper happiness, with ardent and vehement longings; and shall a soul, the noblest of all creatures, stand folding up itself in itself, or choking up its wide and divine capacity with dust and dirt? Shall a godly soul, the noblest of all souls, hang the wing, suspend its motions towards the supreme good, or so much as once offer to faint and languish in its enterprises for eternal life? Tell it not at Athens, publish it not at Rome, lest the heathen philosophers deride and hiss us out of the world.

But you will ask me, When a christian may be said to be sluggish and unactive? and who these lazy souls are? I will premise two things, and then give you a brief account of them. *1st*, When I speak of a sluggish and spiritless religion, I do not speak as the hot-spirited Anabaptists or Chiliasts, who being themselves acted by a strange fervour of mind, miscalled zeal, are wont to declaim against all men as cold and benumbed in their spirits, who do not call for fire from heaven to consume all dissenters, under the notion of Antichristian; who are not afraid to reproach the divine, holy, gentle, yet generous spirit of religion: calling it weak, womanish, cowardly, low, cold, and I know not what. These men, I believe, so far as I can guess at their spirit, if they had lived in the days of our Saviour, and had beheld that gentle, meek, humble, peaceable, and pacate spirit, which did infinitely shine forth in him, would have gone nigh to have reproved him for not carrying on his own kingdom with sufficient vigour and activity; if not have judged Christ himself to be much Antichristian. I hope you see nothing in all my discoveries of the active spirit of religion that savours of such a fiery spirit as this is. *2dly*, When I do so highly commend the active spirit of true religion, and the vigorous temper of truly religious souls, I would not be understood as if I thought all such souls were alike swift, or that any such soul did always move with like swiftness, and keep a like pace towards God. I know that there are different sizes of active souls, yea, and different degrees of activity in the same soul, as may

Digitized by Google

be seen, *Cant.* v. 3 compared with the sixth verse of the same chapter, and in many other places of scripture.

But yet, that none may flatter and deceive themselves with an opinion of their being what indeed they are not, I will briefly discover the sluggishness and inactivity of christians in a few particulars. I pray take it not ill though the greatest part of christians be found guilty; for that is no other than what Christ himself hath prophesied.

1. The active spirit of religion in the soul will not suffer men to take up their rest in a constant course of external performances; and they are but slothful souls, that place their religion in any thing without them. By external performances I mean not only open, and public, and solemn services, but even the most private, and secret performances that are in and by the body, and, *ab extra*, to the soul. It is not possible that a soul should be happy in any thing that is extrinsical to itself, no not in God himself, if we consider him only as something without the soul: the devil himself knows and sees much of God without him; but, having no communications of a divine nature or life, being perfectly estranged from the life of God, he remains perfectly miserable. I doubt it is a common deceit in the world, men toil and labour in bodily acts of worship and religion in a slavish and mercenary manner, and think, with those labourers in the parable, that at the end they must needs receive great wages, and much thanks, because they have borne the heat and burden of the day. Alas, that ever men should so grossly mistake the nature of religion, as to sink it into a few bodily acts and carcase-services, and to think it is nothing else but a running the round of duties and ordinances, and a keeping up a constant set and course of actions! I know indeed that men will be loth to confess that they place their religion in any thing without them; but, I pray consider seriously wherein you excel other men, save only in praying or hearing now and then, or some other outward acts, and judge yourselves by your nature, and not by your actions.

Digitized by Google

2. The active spirit of religion, where it is in the soul, will not suffer men to take up their rest in a mere pardon of sin; and they are but slothful souls that could be so satisfied. Blessed is the man indeed whose iniquities are pardoned, *Ps.* xxxii. 1, 2. But if we could suppose a soul to be acquitted of the guilt of all sin, and yet to lie bound under the dominion of lusts and passions, and to live without God in the world, it were yet far from true blessedness. A real hell and misery will arise out of the very bowels of sin and wickedness, though there should be no reserve of fire and brimstone in the world to come. It is utterly impossible that a soul should be happy out of God, though it had the greatest security imaginable that it should never suffer any thing from him. The highest care and ambition indeed of a slavish and mercenary spirit is to be secured from the wrath and vengeance of God, but the breathings of the ingenuous and holy soul are after a divine life, and godlike perfections. This right gracious temper you may see in David, *Ps.* li. 9, 10, 11, 12. which is also the temper of every truly religious soul.

3. The active spirit of religion, where it is in the soul, will not suffer men to take up their rest in mere innocency, and freedom from sin; and they are slothful souls that could count it happiness enough to be harmless. I doubt men are much mistaken about holiness; it is more than mere innocency, or freedom from the guilt or power of sin, it is not a negative thing; there is something active, noble, divine, and powerful, in true religion. A soul that rightly understands its own penury and self-insufficiency, and the emptiness and meanness of all creature-good, cannot possibly take up its rest, or place its happiness in any thing but in a real participation of God himself; and therefore is continually making out towards that God from whom it came, and is labouring to unite itself more and more unto him. Let a low-spirited, fleshly-minded Pharisee take up with a negative holiness and happiness, as he doth, *Luke.* xviii. 11. *God, I thank thee that I am not* so and so: a noble and high-

Digitized by Google

spirited christian cannot take up his rest in any negation or freedom from sin. Every godly soul is not so learned, indeed, as to be able to describe the nature and proper perfection of a soul, and to tell you how the happiness of a soul consists, not *in quiete*, but *in actu et vigore*, not in cessation and rest, as the happiness of a stone doth, but in life. and power, and vigour, as the happiness of God himself doth: but yet the spirit of true religion is so excellent and powerful in every godly soul, that it is still carrying it to the fuller enjoyment of an higher good: and the soul doth find and feel within itself, though it cannot discourse philosophically of these things, that, though it were free from all disturbance of sin and affliction in the world, yet still it wants some supreme and possible good to make it completely happy, and so bends all its power thitherward. This is the description which you will every where find made in scripture of the true spirit of holiness, which hath always something positive and divine in it, as *Isa.* i. 16, 17. *Cease to do evil, learn to do well;* and *Eph.* iv. 22—24. *Put off the old man, put on that new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.* And accordingly a truly godly person, to use the apostle's words, though he know nothing by himself, yet doth not thereby count himself happy.

4. The active spirit of true religion, where it is in the soul, will not suffer men to take up their rest in some measures of grace received; and so far as the soul doth so, it is sluggish and less active than it ought to be. This, indeed, oftentimes comes to pass when the soul is under some distemper of proud selfishness, earthly-mindedness, or the like, or is less apprehensive of its object and happiness; as it seems to have been the case of the spouse, *Cant.* v. 3. Some such fainting fits, languishings, surfeitings, insensibleness, must be allowed to be in the godly soul during its imprisoned and imperfect state: but we must not judge ourselves by any present distempers, or infirmities. The nature of religion, when it acts the soul rightly and powerfully, is to

Digitized by Google

carry it after a more lively resemblance of God, which is the most proper and excellent enjoyment of him. A mind rightly and actually sound is most sick of love; and the nature of love is, not to know when it is near enough to its object, but still to long after the most perfect conjunction with it. This well of water, if it be not violently obstructed for a time, is ever springing up till it be swallowed up in the ocean of divine love and grace. The soul that is rightly acquainted with itself and its God, sees something still wanting in itself, and to be enjoyed in him, which makes it that it cannot be at rest, but is still springing up into him, till it come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of its Lord. In this holy, loving, longing, striving, active temper, we find the great apostle, *Phil.* iii. 12, 13, 14. And by how much the more of divine grace any soul hath drunk in, the more thirsty is it after much more.

5. The active spirit of true religion, where it is powerfully seated in the minds of men, will not suffer them to settle into a love of this animal life, nor indeed suffer them to be content to live for ever in such a kind of body as this; and that soul is in a degree lazy and slothful, that doth not desire to depart and be with his Lord. The godly soul eying God as its perfect and full happiness, and finding that its being in the body doth separate it from God, keeps it in a poor and imperfect state, and hinders its blissful communion with the highest good, groans within itself that mortality were swallowed up of life, with the apostle, *2 Cor.* v. 4. I know not how much, but I think he hath not very much of God, neither sight of him nor love of him, that could be content to abide for ever in this imperfect, mixed, low state, and never be perfected in the full enjoyment of him. And it seems that they in whom the love of God is rightly predominant, potent, and flourishing, do also look earnestly *for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life,* Jude 21. without doubt they ought to do. *2 Pet.* iii. 12. *What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the*

Digitized by Google

coming of the day of God? Let this suffice by way of general reprehension.

2. More particularly, the consideration of the active nature of true religion may well serve to correct a mistake about that noble grace of faith. How dishonourable do some speak of this excellent and powerful grace, when they make it to be a slothful, passive thing, an idle kind of waiting, or a melancholic sitting still; which, indeed and in truth, is life and power. Be not mistaken in so high and eminent a grace: true faith doth not only accept the imputed righteousness of Christ for justification, but by a lively dependence upon God drinks in divine influences, and eagerly sucks in grace, and virtue, and life, from the fountain of grace, for its more perfect sanctification: and for this cause, I think, a purifying virtue is ascribed to it; *Acts* xv. 9. Faith is not a lazy languid thing, content to wait for salvation till the world to come; but it is even now gasping after it, and accomplishing it too in a way of mortification, self-denial, and growing up in God: it is not content to be a candidate waiting for life and happiness, but is actually drawing down heaven into the heart, attracting God to itself, and sucking in participations of divine grace and image into the soul: its motto is that of the famous painter, *Nulla dies sine lineâ;* it longs to find some divine lineament, some line of God's image drawn upon the soul daily. Faith is a giving grace, as well as receiving; it gives up the whole soul to God, and is troubled that it can give him no more: it binds over the soul afresh to God every day, and is troubled that it can bind it no faster nor closer to him. The believing soul is wearied because of murderers, murdering loves, lusts, cares, earthly pleasures, and calls mightily upon Christ to come and take vengeance upon them: it is wearied because of those robbers that are daily stealing away precious time and affections from God, which are due unto him, and calls upon Christ to come and scourge these thieves, these buyers and sellers,

Digitized by Google

out of his own temple. In a word, the godly soul is active, and faith is the very life and action of the soul itself.

Lastly, Let me exhort all christians from hence to be zealous, to be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, and longing after him; *stir up the grace of God that is in you; quench not*, i. e. blow up, enflame the Spirit of God in you. Awake, christian soul, out of thy lethargy, and rejoice, as the sun, to run the race that is set before thee, and, as a mighty man refreshed with wine, to fight thy spiritual battles against the armies of uncircumcised, profane, and earthly concupiscences, loves, and passions. Eye God as your centre, the enjoyment of him as the happiness, and full conformity to him as the perfection of your souls; and then say, Awake, arise, O my soul, and hide not thy hand in thy bosom, but throw thyself into the very heart and bosom of God; lay hold upon eternal life. Again, observe how all things in the world pursue their several perfections with unwearied and impatient longings, and say, come, my soul, and do thou likewise. Converse not with God so much under the notion of a Law-giver, but as with love itself; nor with his commands, as having authority in them, but as having goodness, and life, and sweetness in them. Again, consider your poverty as creatures, and how utterly impossible it is for you to be happy in yourselves, and say, arise, O my soul, from off this weak and tottering foundation, and build thyself up in God: cease pinching thyself within the straits of self-sufficiencies, and come stretch thyself upon infinite goodness and fulness. Again, pore not upon your attainments; do not sit brooding upon your present accomplishments, but forget the things that are behind, and say, awake, O my soul, there is yet infinitely much more in God; pursue after him for it, till thou have gotten as much as a created being is capable to receive of the divine nature. In a word, take heed you live not by the lowest examples, (which thing keeps many in a dwindling state all their days) but by the highest: read over the spouse her temper, sick of love;

Digitized by Google

David's temper, waiting for God more than they that watch for the morning, breaking in heart for the longing that he had to the Lord, and say, Arise, O my soul, and live as high as the highest. It is no fault to desire to be as good, as holy, as happy as an angel of God; and thus, O my soul, open thy mouth wide, and God hath promised to fill thee!

CHAP. VI.

That religion is a lasting and persevering principle in the souls of men, proved by several scriptures. The grounds of this perseverance assigned; first, negatively, it doth not arise from the absolute inadmissability of grace in the creature, nor from the strength of man's free-will.—Secondly, affirmatively, the grace of election cannot fail. The grace of justification is neither suspended nor violated: the covenant of grace is everlasting: the Mediator of this covenant lives for ever: the promises of it immutable. An objection answered concerning a regenerate man's willing his own apostasy. An objection answered, drawn from the falls of saints in scripture; as also from those scriptures that seem to imply a man's falling away. A discovery of counterfeit religion, and the shameful apostasy of false professors. An encouragement to all holy diligence, from the consideration of this doctrine; the rather that we may stop the mouths of those that falsly affirm that the same is prejudicial to true godliness.

I COME now to the third property of true religion contained in these words, and that is the *perseverance* of it.—And here the foundation of my following discourse shall be this proposition: "True religion is a lasting and persevering principle in the souls of good men."

It is said of the hypocritical Jews, that their goodness was as the *early dew that soon passes away*, Hosea vi. 4. But that principle of goodness which God gives to the souls

Digitized by Google

of his people is compared to *a well of water*, evermore sending forth fresh streams, and incessantly springing up towards God himself. Our Saviour compares hypocritical professors to *seed sown upon stony ground*, that springs up indeed, but soon withers away, *Mark* iv. 5, 6. but this well of water, which is in the sincere godly soul, springs up into everlasting life; it springs and is never dried up; *it is a spring of water, whose waters fail not*, or *lie not*, as it is expressed by the prophet *Isa.* lviii. 11. or if you look upon it under the metaphor of oil, as it is sometimes expressed in scripture, then it is truly that oil that faileth not, whereof the widow of Sarepta's cruise of oil was but a scant resemblance. Amongst other texts which the learned Dr. Arrowsmith brings to prove the infallibility of the perseverance of saints, this speech of our Saviour's which is the subject of my whole discourse, is one; who also quoteth Theophylact for the same mind, viz. the perseverance of this principle, yea, and somewhat more, even the growth and multiplication of it. To the same purpose the same excellent author quoteth *John* x. 27, 28. *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.* In which words our Saviour strongly asserteth the certain glorification of his elect, by using a verb of the present tense, *I give unto them eternal life;* he will as certainly give it them, as if they had it already, except the words do imply that they have it already; viz. the beginnings of it, even in this life: and if so, then the words do yet more strongly assert the doctrine of perseverance; for how can that life be called eternal, which may be ended? In the same words he seemeth purposely to prevent fears, and beforehand to answer objections, by securing them both from internal and external enemies; they shall never perish, viz. of their own accord, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand; for the word in the original is such as doth secure them from the power of devils as well as men; and what is said of the church in

Digitized by Google

general, is also certain concerning every true member of it in particular; *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* Christ hath not only chosen and ordained his people that they should be holy but also that they should persevere in holiness; not only that they should bring forth good fruits, but that their *fruits should remain,* John xv. 15, 16.—Hence they are said to be born again of incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth *for ever,* 1 Pet. i. 23. And he that is born of God, is said to have the seed of God in him, and remaining in him, and so remaining in him as that he shall never again commit sin, that is, shall not become any more ungodly, 1 *John* iii. 9. To all which may be added that strong and strengthning text, *Rom.* viii. 38, 39. *I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord:* which one text doth excellently assert both those high and comfortable doctrines of assurance and perseverance; and they are worthily to be honoured in the church of God, who have vindicated it from the corrupt glosses and cavils of the papists, who have endeavoured to rob christians of the sweetness which may be sucked out of that pregnant honey-comb: in a word, let the holy Psalmist's experience of the supporting virtue of this doctrine shut up the proof of it at present, who found himself wonderfully comforted by it after all his fears and foils, *Ps.* lxxiii. 24. where he sings of the loving-kindness of the Lord in time past; *Thou hast holden me by my right hand;* and, at present, *I am continually with thee;* that is, thou art continually with me; and, with the like courage and confidence, he speaks of all time to come, *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.* Now, although the doctrine of the perseverance of saints be thus fully and clearly laid down in scripture, yet it is easy to err in giving an account of it, and of the grounds of it. And therefore I shall proceed to the grounds of it, which I will

Digitized by Google

briefly lay down negatively and affirmatively. First negatively.

1. The certain perseverance of the saints in a state of grace doth not arise from the absolute inadmissability of grace in the creature: it is one thing to affirm, that grace shall not be lost, and another thing to affirm, that it is absolutely unloseable. God hath told us, that the world shall no more be drowned, but who will say for all that that it is not in itself capable of drowning? whilst we think to honour God by asserting the permanency of grace, we must take heed lest we make a god of grace, and so dishonour him. Grace, as it is in God, in the fountain, which divines sometimes call active grace, is eternal and unchangeable, not subject to any defection or alteration. There is no time, or place, or case, wherein the love and goodness of God fail towards his elect. They are one and the same in God towards his people, even when they are under the greatest desertions, and have no sense at all of them; we must not say the sun is grown dark, as often as a dark cloud interposeth between it and our sight. Yea, however it be most certain that the pure and holy God hateth sin even in his elect, yet it is also certain that the good and gracious God loveth the persons of his saints, even at what time they sin: "For the love of God towards the regenerate, saith Davenant, is not bottomed upon their perfect purity and holiness, but upon Christ Jesus the Mediator, who hath transferred their sins upon himself, and so hath redeemed them from the wrath of God." The love and kindness of God towards his people is absolutely unchangeable and everlasting. But grace in the creature, itself being a creature, is not simply and absolutely unchangeable or unloseable: there is a possibility of losing inherent grace, if it be considered in itself; yea, and it would actually be lost and perish, but that God upholdeth his people with one hand, whilst he exerciseth them with the other. Though with all my might I desire to maintain the perseverance of the saints, yet I dare not, as the manner of some is, ground it upon the firmness and rootedness of

Digitized by Google

faith in man, but upon the goodness and faithfulness of God, which are such towards his elect, that he will keep them by his mighty power *through faith unto salvation*, as the apostle expresseth it, 1 Peter i. 5.

2. It doth arise from the strength of man's free-will, as if he were of himself able to keep himself for ever in a state of grace, when God had once put him into it. The saints indeed shall for ever will their own perseverance, as we shall see anon, but it is God that worketh in them even this will *Phil.* ii. 13. Man's own free-will, or self-sufficiency, is so far from being the ground of his perseverance in grace and holiness, that I do believe nothing in the world is more directly contrary to grace than habitual and predominant self-confidence; and, even in the saints themselves, there is nothing that doth strike a greater stroke towards their apostasy, that this self-conceit and confidence of their own strength, as something distinct from God, though the same be not habitual and predominant; for they themselves are many times sadly weakened and set back by that means, and suffer many lamentable spiritual decays. This seems to have sometimes been the case of Hezekiah and of David too, and had like to have been the case of Paul, when he had so much abounded in revelations, 2 *Cor.* xii. 7. Sure it is, that nothing doth more estrange the hearts of God's people from him, nor bind up the influences of divine grace and favour from them, that this security, confidence in the strength of their own wills, and vain opinion of self-sufficiency, which thing the sad experience of holy christians doth attest: not only the apostles James and Peter, but indeed all the true disciples of Christ in the world do agree to that proverb, *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.* In a word, though *to do justly*, and *to love mercy*, have indeed much of religion in them, yet unto perseverance it is also required that a man deny himself and the sufficiency of his own free-will; and, in the prophet's expression, *Walk humbly with his God.* You know whose brag it was, *Though all men shall be offended because of*

Digitized by Google

thee, yet will I never be offended; and again, *Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee;* and what was the lamentable consequence of this self-confidence, you know likewise: wherefore *let him that standeth* by his own strength, *take heed lest he fall.*

I proceed now to speak something affirmatively concerning the grounds of the saints perseverance in a state of grace. I have already shewed you that active grace is absolutely of an immutable nature: and although passive grace be not so, yet it shall not be lost totally and finally. For,

1. The grace of election cannot fail. When I think of that uncertain, conditional, mutable decree of saving men, which some ascribe to God, who is infinite and eternal wisdom and oneness, methinks I may, with great reason, apply the apostle's words spoken concerning himself and say, when God is thus graciously minded to elect his people to eternal life, *Doth he use lightness, or the things that he purposeth, doth he purpose according to the flesh,* after the manner of men, who are unsteady and wavering in their determinations? Is there with him yea, yea, and nay, nay? What doth the apostle mean by those words, 2 *Tim.* ii. 19. *The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his?* The apostle, in the foregoing verse, having related the apostasy of Hymeneus and Philetus, and the overthrow of some men's faith by their means, immediately subjoins this comfortable doctrine of the stedfastness and firmness of God's decree of election, to prevent the offence which the saints might take against the falls of others, and to relieve them against the fears that they might possibly conceive concerning their own perseverance; *q. d.* let no one be offended, as if the salvation of the elect stood at uncertainties; it appears that these men were none of God's elect, because they are seduced, and the faith that they had his overthrow; and as for your part who are elected, fear not least ye also should apostatise, it is not possible to deceive the elect in the necessary and funda-

Digitized by Google

mental truths of the gospel, *Matt.* xxiv. 24. fear not lest ye also should be drawn away by the error of the wicked unto perdition, *for the foundation of God standeth sure, &c.* In which sentence, says Dr. Arrowsmith, almost every word breathes firmness and performance: nothing is more firm in a building than the foundation; that you may not doubt of that, it is also called sure, or steady; this sure foundation is said to stand, *i. e.* say the Dutch Annotations, abideth stedfast and certain; for it is the foundation not of man's laying but of God's, with whom there is *no variableness nor shadow of change*; yea, farther, this foundation is said to be sealed; now, what is accounted more firm and sure than those things which are sealed with a seal? especially such a seal as this, *The Lord knoweth who are his;* though the wisest of men are often deceived in their opinions, yet the knowledge of God is infinitely infallible, according to that of Austin, "If any of the elect perish, God is deceived; but God is not deceived, therefore none of the elect can perish, for the Lord knoweth who are his." When Samuel indeed went to separate one of the sons of Jesse from the rest of his brethren to be king over Israel, he first pitched upon Eliab, and afterwards rejected him, 1 *Sam.* xvi. but God is guilty of no such inconstancy in that eternal election which he makes of men to be kings and priests unto himself. Those several acts of divine grace mentioned *Rom.* viii. 29, 30. though they be many links, yet run one into another, and all from first to last make up but one chain; concerning which divine and mysterious concatenation one may boldly use that peremptory prohibition which our Lord useth concerning a less indissoluble conjunction, *Matt.* xix. 6. *What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.*

2. The grace of justification is neither suspended nor violated; it admits neither of intercision nor rescission, neither of pause nor period. There is nothing between justification and glorification in the apostle's sentence, but the copulative *and, Rom.* viii. 30. There is nothing between a justified soul and glory, but a mere passage into it.

Digitized by Google

We may be allowed to triumph with the holy apostle in the forequoted chapter, Who will bring an accusation against God's elect? *Is it God that justifieth?* But what though you be at present justified, may some say, is there not a possibility of being unjustified again, may not the righteousness of the righteous be taken from him, may you not be condemned hereafter? But *who is he that shall condemn us? it is Christ that died:* As if the apostle had said, the love of God towards his justified ones is not grounded upon their purity, loveliness, or perfection, but it is founded in their Redeemer, which Redeemer hath done enough, both to bring them into a justified state, and to keep them in it for ever; it is Christ that died to free them from sin, it is Christ that is arisen again for their justification; *that is at the right hand of God,* to deliver them from all their enemies, that maketh intercession for them, for their perseverance. God loves nothing but the communications of himself; so far as any thing partakes of the divine image, so far it partakes of divine favour and complacency; so that whilst a good man bears a resemblance unto God so long he shall be accepted of him, and embraced in the arms of his love, and that shall be for ever, as we shall see under the head. Until you have blotted out all the image and superscription of God out of a godly soul, until you have rased out all the stamps and impressions of goodness; in a word, until you have rendered him wicked and ungodly, you cannot abandon him from the embraces of God, which thing men and devils shall never be able to do, as I have partly shewed already, and shall yet shew more at large.

It is true indeed that Adam fell from a just state, though not from a justified state; for that supposes sin formerly committed. But this is no great wonder; for he had his righteousness in himself, and his happiness in his own keeping: but the condition of believers is now more safe and firm, as depending not upon any created power or will, but upon the infinite and effectual help and strength of a Mediator, which will never fail.

Digitized by Google

3. The covenant of grace is everlasting. It hath pleased God to enter into a covenant of grace and peace with every believing soul; which I suppose, I need not go about to prove, all christians acknowledging it, though they do not all agree in one notion of it. Now this covenant, wherein God engages himself to be their God (for that is the summary contents of it on his part) is expressly called by the apostle, *the everlasting covenant*, Heb. xiii. 20. And again, *Jer.* xxxii. 40. *I will make an everlasting covenant with them*; which covenant, and the everlastingness of it, are fully explained in the following words, *I will not turn away from them to do them good:* the inviolable nature of this covenant is also expressly asserted in that famous passage, *Jer.* xxxi. 31, 32. *I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, which my covenant they broke:* as if he had said, "I will make a covenant that shall not be subject to breaches. In the former covenant with their fathers I gave them laws to keep, which they keep not; but, in the new covenant, I will give them also a heart to keep my laws:" it is not possible that covenant should be broken, one principle part of which is an heart both able and willing to keep it. The similitudes which God useth in the 35th, 36th, and 37th verses of that same chapter, do also further confirm and illustrate this doctrine of the everlastingness of this covenant of grace.

Under this head let me glance three things:

1. The Mediator of this covenant lives for ever, and lives to make intercession for believers, *Heb.* vii. 25. and from this the apostle argues, that they shall be saved to the uttermost, or evermore, as the margin reads it. From this also the apostle argues the unchangeable state of believers, as we observed before out of *Rom.* viii. 34. Christ Jesus is always heard and accepted of the Father in all the requests that he maketh to him, according to that in *John* xi. 41, 42. *Jesus lift up his eyes and said, Father, I thank thee, that thou hast heard me, and I know that thou hearest me*

Digitized by Google

always. If these things be so, then the perseverance of the saints is built upon a most certain bottom, is secured against the very gates of hell; for Christ hath prayed for them that they may be where he is, *John* xvii. 24. and in the mean time, that they may be kept *from the evil*, ver. 15. and that their faith *fail not*, Luke xxii. 32.

2. The promises of this covenant are immutable, *they are in Christ Jesus yea and amen*, 2 Cor. i. 20. as if one should say in Latin, *Certo certiora*, perfectly sure and certain. God, who is truth itself, will not, cannot be unto his people as a liar, or *as waters that fail*, as the prophet's phrase is. The infinite fountain of grace and truth cannot possibly become like one of the brooks which Job speaks of, which seem to be full of water, and are so at a certain winter season, but when the poor scorching Arabian comes to look for water thence in summer he goes away ashamed, because they are now vanished, they are consumed out of their place, *Job*. vi. 19, 20. Now the promise is concerning not only grace, but the final perseverance of it: if he promise pardoning grace, it is in these full and satisfying expressions, *I will remember their sin* (any one of their sins) *no more*, Jer. xxxi. 34. If he promise purging and purifying grace, it is in the like amplitude of phrase, *that they may fear me for ever*; and again, *they shall not depart from me*, Jer. xxxii. 39, 40, with many other places of like importance.

3. God is said, 2 *Cor*. vi. 16. to dwell in the souls of his people, in opposition to a wavering man, *who turneth in to tarry for a night*, Jer. xiv. 8. God indeed hath promised that it shall be said to them that were not his people, *Ye are the sons of the living God*, Hos. i. 10. but never on the contrary; he hath no where threatened them that are the sons of the living God that it shall at any time be said to them, *Ye are not my people*. True indeed, as to external profession, church-membership, mere covenant holiness, and outward communion, God doth many times disinherit and reject them that were so his people: but as to true godliness, participation of the divine image, internal and spiritual

Digitized by Google

communion, we may confidently say with the apostle to the Corinthians, 1 *Cor.* i. 9. *God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;* or, with the same apostle to the Thessalonians, 1 *Thess.* v. 24. *Faithful is he that calleth you, who will also do it:* Do what? why, that which he was speaking of and praying for in *ver.* 23, viz. *Preserve spirit, soul, and body, blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I conclude then, that grace in the creature is a participation of him who is essential and perfect grace and goodness, a communication made by him of his holy nature, which becomes a living principle in the souls of men, a fountain sending forth a continued stream of holy dispositions and affections without intercession or cessation: though these streams run sometimes higher, sometimes lower, sometimes swifter, sometimes slower, yet they are never wholly dried up as the brook of Tema were. For, where God hath once opened a fountain in the soul, he feeds it with fresh supplies from himself; as a fountain itself would dry up, if it were not nourished by the supplies of subterraneous waters. The perseverance of grace depends purely upon the supports and supplies of uncreated essential life and goodness. But how do we know that God will certainly afford these supplies? We build upon his goodness and love in Christ towards his elect, which is infinite and unspeakable; and upon his faithfulness in accomplishing his promise, *viz.* that he will never leave nor forsake them, *Heb.* xiii. 5. that he will keep them by his power unto salvation, 1 *Pet.* i. 5. They that are of the number of God's holy and chosen ones shall, no doubt, continue of that number according to that in 1 *John* ii. 19. They that are truly in Christ shall abide in him, *John.* ii. 27. The seed of God remaineth in the godly, and they cannot sin, because they are born of God, 1 *John* iii. 9 *He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not,* 1 John. v. 18. What can be more express and ample than that consolatory promise of our Lord made to his poor frail

Digitized by Google

sheep, *John* x. 28, *I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand.*

But some one may say perhaps, What if man will apostatise? what if the saints themselves will forsake God? will he not then say of them, as the apostle of the unbelieving husband, *If they will depart, let them depart?* Will not God forsake them that forsake him?

Answ. Yes, God will forsake them that forsake him; but they never shall forsake him: they being rightly renewed after the image of God, and perfectly overpowered by his grace, shall never will any such departure: *I will betroth thee unto me for ever*, Hosea, ii. 19. "It is certain, saith Dr. Arrowsmith, that God will condemn all impenitent sinners; but it is as certain that all justified and regenerate sinners shall repent, *semper fit, procurante spiritu.*" It seems unreasonable to demand, What if man himself will apostatise? seeing he is, by the grace of God, so renewed in his will, and put into such a condition, that he cannot will any such thing. "God doth not give unto his saints, saith Austin, only such help without which they could not persevere if they would (which was that which he gave Adam;) but he also worketh in them the will: that because they shall not persevere except they both can and will, his bountiful grace bestoweth upon them both the can and the will: for their will is so inflamed by the spirit of God, that they therefore can, because they so will; they therefore so will, because God worketh in them to will." Neither is it any disparagement or injury to the freedom of man's will, that it should be overpowered by divine grace, and determined only to that which is good. The indifferency and fluctuation of the will of man is indeed the imperfection of it; and the more God reveals himself to the soul, as the chiefest good, the more this indifferency of the will is destroyed, and the faculty is determined; not by being constrained, but indeed perfected. O happy liberty, for a soul to be indifferently affected towards its own happiness, and

Digitized by Google

to be free to choose its own misery! The noblest freedom in the world is, when a soul being delivered from its hesitancies, and healed of its indifferences, is carried like a ship with spread sails and powerful winds in a most speedy, cheerful, and steady course its own harbour, into the arms and embraces of its own object. The grace of God doth never so overpower the will of man, as to reduce it to a condition of slavery, so as that man should not have a proper dominion over his own acts; but I think we generally conclude that, in the world to come, in the future state, the wills of all glorified saints shall be so advanced and perfected in their freedom, as not in the least to verge towards any thing that is evil, but shall in the most gladsome and steady manner be eternally carried towards their full and glorious object, which the glorified understanding shall then represent in a most true, clear, and ample manner; and this we take to be the soul's truest liberty in the highest elevation of it. Now, although it be not altogether thus with us in this present world, (for by reason of the weakness and muddiness of our understandings which do here represent God unto us so faintly and disadvantageously, it comes to pass that the will cannot so freely and fervently, with so ardent and generous motions pursue its excellent object, as it shall do hereafter) yet I believe that the more God reveals himself to any soul, the more the fluctuations and equilibriousness of it are healed, and a true liberty of will increased; and that he doth so far reveal himself to every truly godly soul, as to establish this noble freedom in it, in such a degree as will keep it from willing a final departure from him, and carry it certainly (how remissly and faintly soever) towards the supreme and sovereign good, till it come to be perfectly swallowed up in it. A will thus truly and divinely free, though it be not the proper efficient cause, yet certainly is an inseparable concomitant of final perseverance. So then the more God communicateth himself to any soul, the more powerfully it willeth a nearer conjunction with him; and no soul, I conceive, to whom God communicat-

Digitized by Google

eth himself savingly, can at any time will an utter separation from him.

As for the foulest falls of scripture saints, that are any where recorded, I know not what more can rationally be inferred from them, but that grace in the creature admits of ebbs and flows, is subject to augmentations and diminutions; which I know no sober person that denies. But I think the history of their lapses, if we take it altogether, hath a very favourable aspect upon the doctrine of perseverance; yea, for, ought I know, one great design of God in penning those relations, might be to confirm this very doctrine, by giving us so express and ample account of their repentance and recovery, that we are indeed to believe they were strengthened by their falls, so far were their falls from proving mortal to them: one would think, that if ever the habits of grace should be utterly suffocated and extinct, if ever they should languish even unto death, it should be under the power of such contrary acts as David and Peter commited, and especially Solomon, whose acts, for ought I can see, were as foul, and also often repeated, which is the likeliest thing that I know to destroy gracious habits. I know there are instances given of good Joash, Hymeneus, Alexander, and Demas, utterly falling from that gracious state, wherein sometime they had been. But it did never yet appear to me beyond contradiction, that ever they were any of them in such a state. Joash is put amongst the number of hypocrites by some that have examined his story: and for ought that can evidently appear to the contrary, Demas might be no better. Most is pleaded for Hymeneus and Alexander, who put away a good conscience, and made shipwreck of faith, 1 *Tim.* i. 20. But it does not yet appear that the faith which they made shipwreck of, was any more than the profession or doctrine of the true faith; yea, rather it doth appear that it was no more. Neither does it at all appear, that they ever had that good conscience, which they are said, in our translation, to have put away,

Digitized by Google

which may as fitly be rendered, rejected; *arceo, prohibeo, resisto, renitor, repello,* to reject, repel, or thrust away from one. I am not confident that this apostasy of theirs was totally neither, supposing it to be an apostasy; for however their faith was shipwrecked, possibly some plank or other of it might be left. And who dare say that it was final? the apostle doth not, that I perceive, give them up for lost, but executes discipline upon them, as it seems, for their recovery, of which one might think, by the following words, that he had some hopes, — *that they may learn not to blaspheme.* In short then, as to these two men, I conceive, that good conscience which they put away they never had, and the faith which they had was not that good faith. And as to the other two that were named, and indeed as to all other instances of the like nature, I suppose we may give this general answer, that either they did not seem to stand, or they did not seem to fall; the former perhaps was the case of Joash, and the latter of Demas.— Whenever you observe therefore the backslidings of any seeming christians, take heed of concluding rashly against the perseverance of saints, but rather infer with the holy apostle, 1 *John* ii. 19. *They went out from us, but they were not of us: had they been of us, they would, no doubt, have continued with us:* which words, if they meant only of a communion in doctrine and profession, so as to conclude against the separation of such as are indeed in such a communion; then we may argue the more strongly, *a minore ad majus,* against the final apostasy of any that are in a higher and more excellent communion.

As for those texts of scripture that seem to suppose a man's falling away, from grace, and turning from righteousness, I conceive a fair answer may be given unto them, by distinguishing righteousness; and so it may be granted, that many men have turned away from, and utterly made shipwreck of their legal righteousness, consisting in an external conformity to the letter of the precepts of the law, void of the supernatural and divine principle: it is indeed

Digitized by Google

the common lot of these men that spring up thus fairly, and yet have no root to *wither away*, Matt. xiii. 6. Luke viii. 6. And yet on the other hand, it abides an everlasting maxim of truth, *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God*, 1 John iii. 9. If there be any texts that seem to speak of apostatising from an evangelical righteousness, a righteousness of faith, and so cannot well be salved by this distinction, as that in *Heb.* x. 38. and some others, it must be considered that suppositions are made of things impossible as well as possible, yea, and that even in the scriptures themselves, as some have observed from *Gal.* i. 8. 1 *Cor.* xv. 14. which texts do not at all imply what they suppose. I know indeed that eternal salvation is ordinarily entailed upon perseverance, and so is promised to us in scripture, as it were conditionally, *John* viii. 31. *If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. Col.* i. 21, 22, 23. *You hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh, through death, to present you holy, and unblameable, and unreproveable in his sight, if ye continue in the faith, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, &c.* To the same purpose are those words, *He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved;* and *Rev.* ii. 26. *He that overcometh, and keepeth my words unto the end, to him will I give, &c.* All which do strongly imply that there is no salvation but in a way of perseverance; and the words being laid down thus conditionally, especially the words first quoted, are indeed cautionary and quickening to the dull and sluggish minds of men, but do not necessarily imply any uncertainty or doubtfulness in the thing itself, no more than those words of the apostle Peter, 1 *Pet* i. 10. compared with the latter end of the 12th verse, where he doth affirm them to be *established in the truth*, and yet at the same time doth speak to them by way of caution and encouragement. There are many texts that seem to suppose the apostasy of men in a state of regeneration, but not one that doth assert it, that ever I could yet find; but they are almost without

Digitized by Google

number, that, to my apprehension, do more than seem to assert the contrary, *viz.* their final perseverance: of which perseverance we have also, through the goodness of God, thousands of instances; but no man could ever yet produce one instance of the contrary, but by mere conjecture; which conjectures, let them that make them see that they be neither over charitable towards men, or uncharitable towards God.

Wherefore do I conclude that what is said concerning heaven and hell in the parable, as to one branch of it, is true of grace and wickedness; a gulf is fixed, and they that would pass from God to sin and the devil cannot: not that there shall ever be in any a real and predominant desire so to pass, as I suppose I have already proved; but it denotes the impossibility of the thing. It is equally impossible that a godly soul should fall from God, and become an hater of him, fall from his love and image, and take upon him the image of the devil, as it was for Lazarus to quit Abraham's bosom for the flames of hell: the case seems to be the same the former being the most real heaven, and the latter the truest hell. True religion is that holy fire which, being once kindled in the soul from heaven, never goes out; whereof the fire of the altar was but a faint and imperfect resemblance: it is as true in this respect of good men, as it is of wicked men in another, *their fire never goes out.*

And here now we are presented with another great difference between true and counterfeit religion. All counterfeit religion will fade in time, though never so specious and flourishing; all dew will pass away, though some lie much longer than other; all land-floods will fail; yea, the flood of Noah at length dried up, though it were of many months duration. But this well of water, which our Saviour speaks of here, will never utterly fail; cold adversity cannot freeze it up; scorching prosperity cannot dry it up, the upper springs of uncreated grace and goodness will evermore feed those nether springs of grace and holiness in the creature. Though heaven and earth pass away, yet shall the seed of

Digitized by Google

God remain; *He that hath begun a good work will certainly perform it*, Phil. i. 6. Where the grace of God hath begotten a divine principle and spirit of true religion in a soul, there is the central force even of heaven itself still attracting and carrying the soul in its motions thitherward, until it have lodged it in the very bosom and heart of God. If any principle lower than true religion actuate a man, it will certainly waste and be exhausted; though it may carry him swiftly in a rapid motion, yet not in a steady; though it may carry him high, yet not quite through. A meteor that is exhaled from the earth by a foreign force, though it may mount high in appearance, and brave it in a blaze, enough to be envied by the poor twinkling stars, and to be admired by ordinary spectators, yet its fate is to fall, down, and shamefully confess its base original. That religion which men put on only for a cloak, will wear out and drop into rags, if it be not presently thrown by as a garment out of fashion. You have read of the seeming righteousness of Jehu, founded in ambition and cruelty; the piety and devotion of Joash, grounded upon a good and virtuous education; the zeal of Saul for the worship of God, and his fat sacrifices, growing upon a root of superstition, as Samuel, that man of God, interprets it, 1 *Sam.* xv. 22. and you have seen the sameful issue of all these dissemblers, and the stinking snuff in which all this candle-light religion ended, very much unlike to that sun-light lustre of true and genuine goodness, *which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*; according to that elegant description which the Spirit of God makes of it in the writings of Solomon, whose pen hath as much adorned this great truth, as his life hath blotted it, *Prov.* iv. 18. To this purpose I might fairly alledge the frequent testimonies which the Holy Ghost in scripture gives concerning such hypocritical and unprincipled professors, that, having no root, they wither away in a scorching season, that they are again entangled in the pollutions of the world and overcome, that like dogs they turn to their own vomit again, and like sows wallow in the mire from

Digitized by Google

which they had been washed, 2 *Pet.* ii. 20, 22. together with many others of the same nature: as also the prophesies that are made concerning them, that which they seemed to have, shall be taken away from them, *Luke* viii. 18. that they shall proceed no further; *for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, 2 Tim.* iii. 9. *that evil men and seducers* and of those self-seducers are the worst, *shall wax worse and worse,* 2 Tim. iii. 13 with other places of the like nature. It were easy to record many histories of men, especially of great men, who have speedily, I had almost said disdainfully, thrown off that semblance of humility, meekness, self-denial, justice, and faithfulness, which they had put on for a vizard during their probationaryship for preferment, the better to accomplish their selfish designs, and to be possessed of some base ends of their own. But yet I will not deny but that a hypocrite may maintain a fair conformity to, and correspondence with the letter of the law of God; he may continue fair and specious to the very end of his life; yea, perhaps may go to his grave undiscovered either to himself, or any in the world besides. I believe many men have lived and died Pharisees, have never apostatised from that righteousness which they professed, but have persevered in their formality and hypocrisy to the last. But yet, although that counterfeit righteousness and religion may possibly not fade away, yet nevertheless being of an earthly and selfish constitution it is transitory and fading; and if it were soundly assaulted and battered with persecutions and temptations, no doubt would actually vanish and disappear; on the other hand, the promise of God is pregnant and precious, *Isa.* xl. 31. *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall walk and not faint.*

Take encouragement from hence, all ye that love the Lord; go on in the strength of God; be the more lively, by how much the more you are assured that this well of water shall spring up in you into everlastinging life. Make this good use of this comfortable doctrine: will God indeed

Digitized by Google

work in you *both to will and to do?* why then so much rather *work out your own salvation,* according to the apostle, *Phil.* ii. 12. Will the Lord God *be with you?* will he *not fail you nor forsake you till you have finished all your work?* why then *be strong and of good courage,* and do as good David infers and argues, 1 *Chron.* xxviii. 20. Have you this hope, this firm ground of hope in the promise and goodness of God? why then, *purify yourselves as God is pure,* according to the apostle, 1 *John* iii. 3. Stop the mouths of those men that say the doctrine of perseverance is prejudicial to godliness: let them see, and be forced to acknowledge it, that the more a godly soul is assured of the infinite and unchangeable love and care of God towards him, the more he is winged with love and zeal, with speed mounting up thither daily, where he longs to arrive. They that understand the doctrine of perseverance, do also understand that they must accomplish it in a way of dutiful diligence and watchful willingness; and if any grow profane and licentious, and apostatise from the way of righteousness which they have known, it is an evident argument to them that they are no saints, and then what will the doctrine of the perseverance of saints avail them?

CHAP. VII.

Religion considered in the consequent of not thirsting: the phrase explained two ways, both resulting into the same general truth, viz. That divine grace gives a solid satisfaction to the soul. This aphorism confirmed by some scriptures, and largely explained in six propositions. The first, That there is a raging thirst in every soul of man after some ultimate and satisfactory good. The second, That every natural man thirsteth principally after happiness in the creature. The third, That no man can find that soul-filling satisfaction in any creature-enjoyment which every natural man principally seeketh therein;

Digitized by Google

this prosecuted in two particulars. The fourth, That grace takes not away the soul's thirst after happiness, but much enflames it; the reason assigned. The fifth, That the godly soul thirsteth no more after rest in any worldly thing, but in God alone; this prosecuted in both the branches of it; in the former more largely, where inquiry is made how far a godly man may be said to thirst after the creature, and answered in four particulars; the latter briefly touched upon. The sixth, That in the enjoyment of God the soul is at rest; and this in a double sense, viz. *so as that it is perfectly matched with its object; two things noted for the clearing of this. Secondly, so satisfied as to have joy and pleasure in him; a double account given of that joy. The chapter expires in a passionate lamentation taken up over the levity and earthliness of Christian minds.*

HITHERTO we have taken a view of true religion, as it stands described in this pregnant text, by its original, nature, and properties; we are now to consider it in the certain and genuine consequent of it; and that is in one word, affirmatively, *satisfaction*; or if you will, negatively, *not thirsting*: for so it is, in our Saviour's phrase, *Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst.*

Whilst I address myself to the explication of this phrase, I suppose I need not be so exact and curious as to tell you in order, with a certain kind of scholastical gravity, first what is not; and then what is meant by it: for I presume no body will dream of a corporeal or gross kind of thirsting to be meant here. Grace doth no more quench the thirst of the body, than elementary water can relieve the panting of the soul. Nay, he himself was subject to this gross kind of thirst, who gave to others the water whereof, if they drank, they should never thirst more. If it be understood of a spiritual thirst, yet I suppose I need not to tell you neither, that then it must not be understood abso-

Digitized by Google

lutely: for it cannot possibly be, that the thirst of a soul should be perfectly allayed till all its faculties be filled up to the brim of their respective capacities, which will never be until it be swallowed up in the infinite and unbounded ocean of the supreme good.

But I conceive we may fairly come to the meaning of this phrase, *never thirst*, either by adding or distinguishing.

1. Then let us supply the sentence thus, *Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst after any other water.* There is no worldly liquor can be so accommodated or attempered to the palate as to give it an universal satisfaction, so as that a man should be perfectly mortified to all variety: but this heavenly water which our Saviour treats of here, is so fitted to the palate of spirits, and brings such satisfaction along with it, that the soul that is made to drink of it does supersede its chase of all other delights, counts all other waters but a filthy and stinking puddle, thirsts no more after any other thing, neither through necessity nor for variety. The more the soul drinks of this water indeed, the more it thirsteth after fuller measures and larger portions of the same; and does not only suck in divine virtue and influences, but even longs to be itself sucked up in the divinity, as we shall see further in the procedure of this discourse: but its thirst after all created good, all the waters of the cistern, are hereby extinguished or at least mastered and mortified. Or,

2. By distinguishing upon thirst, the sense of the phrase will be clearly this, *Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him* shall never be at a loss more, never be to seek any more, never be uncertain or unsatisfied as to his main happiness or supreme object; he shall not rove and range up and down the world in an unfixedness and suspence any more; shall not run up and down to seek satisfaction and rest any more. From an internal unsatisfiedness of the body spring violent and restless motions and runnings up and down, by which thirst is contracted; so

Digitized by Google

that, by metomony, thirst comes to be used for unsatisfiedness, which is the remote cause of it; and, by a metaphor, the same phrase comes to be applied to the soul. I suppose I am warranted, by the sacred stile, thus to interpret, especially by the use and explication of the phrase in *Jer.* ii. 25. where the prophet intimates, that by thirst is to be meant a restless and discontented running up and down to seek satisfaction, *Without thy foot from being unshod, and thy throat from thirst;* which two phrases are of the same importance, and signify no more than cease from gadding after your idols; and that this is the meaning of that thirsting appears by the answer that the wilful and desperate people make in the sequel of the verse: for instead of saying, No, but we will thirst; they cry, *No, but after them will I go.* Thirst then is in an unsatisfiedness and spiritual disquiet to range up and down seeking something wherein ultimately to acquiesce. And, in this sense, it is most true what our Lord here pronounceth, that *whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst.* Of which thirst that famous proclamation of of our Saviour's is to be understood, *John* vii. 37. *If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink;* in which place also we must necessarily understand what is here expressed, that then he shall never thirst more.

It matters not much by which of these two ways we explain the phrase here of *not thirsting;* for, according to either of them, it will result into this theological maxim, *viz.* that "Divine grace, or true christian religion, gives a real and solid satisfaction to the soul that is principled with it."

This will appear plain though we apply but one text out of each Testament of the holy scriptures thereunto. I think it cannot reasonably be doubted, but that the prophecy and promise made in *Isa.* xlix. 10. is to be performed unto believers in this present life; for so much the foregoing verses necessarily be understood: and there we have the doctrine expressly asserted, *They shall not hunger nor thirst,*

Digitized by Google

&c. for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them. To which those words of our Saviour are parallel, *John* vi. 35. *He that believeth on me shall never thirst:* which doctrine of his is yet amplified and enlarged in *John* vii. 38. *He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.* What greater security from thirst can be desired, than that one should be led by springs of water? Yes, one may be led by the springs of water, and yet not be suffered to drink of them: well, therefore, to put all out of fear, the godly soul shall contain within himself a spring of water; he shall have rivers of living waters in himself; and for his fuller security, these rivers shall be ever flowing too. It shall suffice at present, thus briefly to have established this conclusion. And now, having wrapt up the meaning of the words in this short position, I shall endeavour to unfold it in these six following propositions:

1*st*, "There is a raging thirst in every soul of man after some ultimate and satisfactory good." The God of nature hath implanted in every created nature a secret but powerful tendency towards a centre, whose dictates, arising out of the very constitution of it, it cannot disobey until it cease to be such, and utterly apostatise from the state of its creation. And the nobler any being is, the more excellent is the object assigned to it, and the more strong and potent, and uncontrolable are its raptures and motions thereunto. Wherefore the soul of man must needs also have its own proper centre, which must be something superior to, and more excellent than itself, able to fill up all its indigencies, to match all its capacities, to master all its cravings, and give a plenary and perfect satisfaction: which therefore can be no other than uncreated goodness, even God himself. It was not possible that God should make man of such faculties, and those of such capaciousness as we see them, and appoint any thing below himself to be his ultimate happiness. Now, although it be sadly true, that the faculties of the soul are miserably maimed, depraved, benighted

Digitized by Google

and distorted; yet I do not see that the soul is utterly unnatured by sin, so as that any other thing should be obtruded upon it for its centre and happiness, than the same infinite good that was from the beginning such, or so as that its main and cardinal motions should be ultimately directed to any other than its natural and primitive object. The natural understanding hath not indeed any clear or distinct sight of this blessed object; but yet it retains a darker and more general apprehension of him, and may be said, even in all its pursuits of other things, to be still groping in the dark after him: neither is it without some secret and latent sense of God, that the will of man chooseth or embraceth any thing for good.

The apostle sticks not to affirm, that the idolatrous Athenians themselves did worship God, *Acts* xvii. 23. though at that time indeed they knew not what they worshipped: their worship was secretly and implicitly directed unto God, and did ultimately resolve itself into him, though they were not aware of it. *Whom ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you*, and that he declared God unto them, appears abundantly by the following verses. What he says in point of worship, the same methinks I may say in point of love, trust, delight, dependence, and apply it to all sorts of idolaters, as well as image-worshippers, and affirm that the covetous idolater, even when he most fondly hugs his bags, and most firmly confideth in his riches, doth ignorantly love and trust in God; the proud idolater, in the highest acts of self-seeking, and self-pleasing, doth ignorantly admire and adore God; the ambitious idolater, even in the hottest chase of secular glory, and popular applause, doth ignorantly pursue, and advance God. For that rest, contentment, peace, happiness, and satisfaction, which these mistaken souls do aim at, what is it other than God, though they attribute it to something else which cannot afford it, and so commit a real blasphemy? for they that do in their hearts, and course of their lives, ascribe a filling and satisfying virtue to riches, pleasures, or honours, do as

Digitized by Google

truly, though not so loudly, blaspheme, as they who cried out concerning the calf of gold, *Exod.* xxxii. 4. *These be thy gods, O Israel! &c.* And in this sense that I have been speaking, one may safely affirm, that the most professed atheist in the world doth secretly pursue the God whom he openly denies, whilst his will is catching at that which his judgment renounceth, and he allows that deity in his lusts which he will not own in heaven. The hypocrite professes to know God, but in works denies him; on the other hand, the atheist, though in words he deny God, yet in his works he professeth him: so natural and necessary it is for all men to acknowledge a deity, though some are so brutish and besotted as to confine him to their own bellies; of whom the apostle speaks, *Phil.* iii. 19. *Whose god is their belly:* I say natural; for they are not only some few men of better education, and more contemplative complexions, that hunt after this invisible and satisfying good; but indeed the most vulgar souls, retaining still the nature of souls, are perpetually catching at an ultimate happiness and satisfaction, and are secretly stung and tormented with the want of it. Certainly the motions of a soul are more strong and weighty than we are ordinarily aware of; and I think, one may safely conclude, that if there were no latent sense, or natural science of God, the poor man could not spend the powers of his soul so intensely for the purchasing a little food and raiment for the body, nor the covetous man so insatiably thirst after houses and land, and a larger heap of refined earth: did they not secretly imagine, I mean, some contentment, happiness, or satisfaction, were to be drunk in together with these acquirements, they would seem to be but dry and insipid morsels to a soul; which ultimate happiness and satisfaction, as I said before, can be no other than God himself, whom these mistaken souls do ignorantly adore, and feel for in the dark.

Neither let any one think that this ignorant and unwary pursuit of God can pass for religion, or be acceptable

Digitized by Google

in the sight of God; for as it is impossible that ever any man should stumble into a happy state, without foresight and free choice, and be in it without any kind of sense or feeling of it; so neither can God accept the blind for sacrifice, or be pleased with any thing less than reasonable service from a reasonable creature. As the Athenians, worshipping God by altars and images, are counted superstitious, not devout, so the whole generation of gross and sensual souls admiring, loving, and ignorantly coveting after God in the pictures and images of true goodness, are indeed, truly blasphemers and idolaters, but religious they cannot be. We cannot excuse them from idolatry, who direct their worship purposely to the true God by or through images; much less sure can we be favourable to them who bestow their love, joy, confidence, and delight, ignorantly upon the supreme and self-sufficient good, by or through any created good, in which they, as far as they understand, do terminate their devotion. I do not say that all souls have a distinct discovery of the good they aim at, it is evident they have not; but yet the will of every man is secretly in chase of some ultimate end and happiness, and indeed in its eager tendencies outflies the understanding. All which mystery seems to be wrapped up in that short but pithy inquiry, which, if it were a little otherwise modified, would be an excellent description of the natural soul, *Ps.* iv. 6. *Many say, Who will shew us any good?* The nature of the object is set out in the word *good*, the eagerness of the motion, in the form of the question, *Who will shew us?* and the ignorance of the mover appears in the indeterminateness of this object, which is well explained by the supply of the word *any*; *Who will shew us any good?* And that this is the cry of every rational soul is insinuated by the word *many;* which *many* is also in mere multiplied into the greater sort, and must indeed necessarily be extended unto all.

2dly, "Every natural man thirsteth principally after happiness and satisfaction in the creature." The fall of the soul

Digitized by Google

consisteth in its sinking itself into the animal life, and the business of every unrenewed soul is in one kind or other still to gratify the same life; for although, as I have shewn, God is at the bottom of these men's cares, and loves, and desires, and implicitly in all their thirstings, yet I may well say of them, as God says of the Assyrian monarch, at what time he executed his pleasure in correcting his people Israel, *Isa.* x. 7. *Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so.* God is not in all their thoughts, whilst they pursue that in the creature which really none but God alone can be unto them. They do ultimately direct, as to their intention, all their cares, and covetings, and thirstings, to some created object; all which are calculated for the animal life, the gratifying and accomplishing their own base lusts. This is very apparent in the idolatry of the Pagans, whose lusts gave being to their gods; and so their deities were as many as their concupiscences and filthy passions: to sacrifice to their own revenge and sensuality, under the names of Mars, Bacchus, and Venus, what was it else but to proclaim to all the world that they took the highest contentment and satisfaction in the fulfilling of such kind of lusts? this was unto them their god or supreme felicity.—The case is the same, though not so expressly and professedly, with all carnal christians who, although they profess the true God, yet in truth make him only a pander to their own lusts and base ends; though they *name the name of Christ*, yet in very deed deify their own passions, and sacrifice to the gratification of their animal powers. The Psalmist, as we have seen, determines the main end of all men to be good, *Ps.* iv. 6. but, lest any man should be deceived in them, he presently tells us where this good was placed, *ver.* 7. *viz.* in *corn and wine*; by which we must understand the animal life, and whatsoever administers to the delight thereof. And certainly this will go far; for not only meats and drinks, venereal pleasures, gorgeous apparel, sumptuous buildings, splendid descent, honourable preferments, popular applause, inordinate recreations, and an

Digitized by Google

unweildy bulk of earthly riches; but also orthodox opinions, philosophical, political, yea, and scholastical learning, fair professions, much pompous worship, yea, and worship industriously void of pomp, specious performances; to which we may add the most seemly exercises of undaunted valour, unshaken constancy, unbribed justice, uninterrupted temperance, unspotted chastity, and unlimited charity, if much giving may deserve so sacred a name; even all these, and as many more, may serve only as fuel for the rapacious fire of lust and self-love, to maintain and keep alive the mere animal, or at most logical life, and are ordinarily designed as sacrifices to that which we significantly call *self*, in contradistinction from God.

I need not here declaim against covetous, luxurious, ambitious souls, the apostle having so expressly prevented me by his plain and punctual arraignment of such men, *Col.* iii. 5. *Phil.* iii. 19. where he charges them with placing a deity in their bags and bellies: otherwise I durst appeal to all the world that are not parties, yea, to the parties themselves, whether it be God or themselves that these persons do intend to serve, and please, and gratify; whether it be a real assimilation unto God, and the true honour of his name, or some lust or humour of self-pleasing, self-advancing, and self-enjoying, that they sacrifice their care and pains, and the main thirstings of their souls unto. I am confident it will be easily acknowledged, that the covetous, voluptuous, and ambitious, do sacrifice all they are and do to the latter; but, alas? it is not yet agreed among men who are such; the hypothesis is granted, but the thesis is disputed: and indeed this is no wonder neither; for it is as natural for the animal self-life to shift off guilt as it is to contract it; and the pride of the natural man is no less conspicuous in his wrongful endeavours to seem innocent of what he is indeed guilty, than his covetousness and voluptuousness are apparent in the matter wherein his guilt consisteth. They are not only these, and some few of the grossest and profanest sort of souls, that are guilty in this

Digitized by Google

kind which I have been describing, though they indeed are grossly and most visibly guilty; but verily the whole generation of mere animal men, who have no principle of divine life implanted in them, do spend all their days, bestow all their pains, and enjoy all their comforts, in a real strain of blasphemy, from first to last. What a blasphemous kind of philosophy was that which professedly placed the supreme good and chiefest happiness of man in the fruition of pleasures: And indeed all those kinds of philosophy which placed it elsewhere, in things below God himself; and the enjoyment of him, were no less profane though they may seem somewhat less beastly: for whether the Epicureans idolized their own senses, or the more exalted Stoics deified their own faculty, placing their main contentment in their self-sufficiency, and the perpetual serenity and tranquillity of their own minds, it is too apparent that both the one and the other still move within the narrow and low sphere of natural self, and grasped after a deity in the poor dark shadows, and glimmering representatives of him. But I am speaking to christians: and, amongst these, let no man tell me how orthodox his opinions, how pure and spiritual his forms, how numerous and specious his performances are, how rightly he pays his homage, and prays to one living God by one living Mediator; I will willingly allow, and do with delight observe these things wherever they are; but yet all this doth not denominate a christian: for still that of the apostle must hold good, *Rom.* vi. 16. *His servants ye are to whom ye obey;* and I may add by somewhat a like phraseology, *His children ye are whom ye resemble;* his creatures ye are, as far as ye can make yourselves so, whose sufficiency and sovereignity are mostly magnified in your hearts; his worshippers ye are whom ye mostly love, trust in, delight in, depend upon; in a word, that is your god which your soul doth mainly rest, and centre, and wrap up itself in. And, alas! how visibly dear and precious is the self-central life, which is so universally pampered, cherished, and sacrificed unto, besides the in-

Digitized by Google

visible and more spiritual oblations that are made thereunto. This is as true an Antichrist in the mystery as there is any literal Antichrist in the world; and of this one may as truly say, as St. John doth of the other. *All the world wondereth after the beast.* In a word then, whosoever saith in his heart concerning any thing that is not God, what that rich man in the gospel said concerning his goods, *Soul, take thine ease,* in them *and be merry,* the same is an idolater and blasphemer: and this I affirm to be the language of every apostate spirit, and unregenerate soul of man.

3dly, "No man can find that happiness, and soul-filling satisfaction in any creature-enjoyment, which every natural man principally seeketh therein." Here are two things to be spoken to, *viz.* the enjoyments of men, or what they possess, and the satisfaction which the natural man seeketh in such possessions. For the first of these, I do not easily believe that ever any natural man had his fill of such possessions, I mean as to the quantity of them; he never had so much of them as to be able freely to say, "It is enough." The rational soul hath a strong and insatiable appetite, and wheresoever it imagineth its beloved prey to be found, and filling enjoyment to be had, it is exceeding greedy and rapacious; whether the same will ever be able to afford it or no, it matters not. The animal life is that voracious idol, not like Bel in the story, which seems only to eat up, but which doth really devour all the fat morsels, and sensual pleasures that are sacrificed unto it, and yet is not filled therewith. The whole employment of the natural man, *quantum, quantum est,* is nothing else but as the apostle elegantly describes it, *Rom.* xiii. 14. *To make provision for the flesh, to fulfil it in the lusts thereof:* wherein yet, to speak the truth, he loses his labour; for he sacrifices all to an unsatisfiable idol, and pours it into a gulph that hath neither bottom nor bounds, but swalloweth up all into its barren womb, and is rather made to thirst, than to cease from thirsting by all that is or can be administered unto it. I take that of Solomon, *Eccl.* i. 8. to be a clear proof in

Digitized by Google

general of what I affirm, *The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing;* the eye of man, as little as it is, is bigger than the whole conspicable world, which, although it may be wearied with looking upon various objects, as the English annotators observe upon these words, yet still desires new ones, and can drink them in without surfeiting: so that, although the acts of the eye be scant and finite, yet the lusts of the eye seem to have a kind of infinity in them. And indeed by the unsatiableness of the eye and ear, is meant the greediness or voracity of the flesh or animal life, as Mr. Cartwright hath well observed upon *Prov.* xxvii. 20. *Hell and destruction are never full, so the eyes of a man are never satisfied;* where, by not being satisfied, is meant not having enough in quantity, as appears by the similitude in the former part of the verse. To the same sense he speaks, *Eccl.* iv. 8. and v. 10. It would be endless to relate the monstrous and insatiable gapings of covetous, ambitious, voluptuous, proud, and vain-glorious minds after their respective idols. And indeed I need not descend to particular instances; for I suppose never any natural man could heartily say he had enough of riches, promotions, applause, sensual delights, eloquence, policy, prowess, or victory, or of any other thing which is accommodated to the gratification of the flesh, no more than a godly soul sojourning upon earth could ever be yet able to say it had enough of God and eternal life. So that, in a word, I know not how to apply any description to this insatiable and devouring principle more properly than that which the prophet makes of hell, *Isa.* v. 44. *She enlargeth herself, and openeth her mouth without measure, and all glory, multitude, and pomp, descend into it.* I know there are of these men that pretend to have enough in quantity of these fleshly provisions; but I fear falsly and unjustly: for, as for the rich and honourable of the earth, it is too evident that they are still climbing higher, and grasping after more, as the great Alexander is said to have whined after more worlds, when he conceited himself to be master

Digitized by Google

of all this: as for the poorer and meaner sort of people, who are as ready sometimes to lay claim to this virtue of thinking themselves to have enough, as any other people whatsoever, it is too manifest to a wise observer, that it is not a real apprehension that they have enough, but either a lowness or weakness of spirit, arising from the meanness of their education, or a downright despair of ever getting more.

But be it imagined that the enjoyments of some natural men are enough in respect of quantity, yet still there is certainly wanting a true and sincere satisfaction of soul in such possessions; no man of all these finds that real happiness in those things which he so vehemently hunteth after. Solomon reduces all of pleasure and contentment that is to be found in multiplied riches to a very pitiful *summa totalis*, *Eccl.* v. 11. *What good is there to the owners thereof, save the beholding of them with their eyes?* And, alas! what is the sight of the eye to the satisfaction of the soul! The whole conspicable world is utterly too scant for, and incommensurate to the wide and deep capacity of an immortal spirit; so that the same can no more satisfy than a less can fill a greater, which is surely impossible. Whatever is in the world out of God, is described by the prophet, *Isa.* lv. 2. to be *not bread*, there is the unsuitableness; and *not to satisfy*, there is the insufficiency of it as to the soul of man: on the other hand, this soul of man is so vastly capacious, that though it be also never so greedy and rapacious, snatching on the right hand, and catching on the left hand, as the prophet describes his people, *Isa.* ix. 20. yet still it is hungry and unsatisfied. Which ravenous and insatiable appetite of the sensual soul, is elegantly described by the prophet in the similitude of an whorish woman, who prostituteth herself to all comers, and *multiplieth her fornications*, yet is *unsatiable, is not, cannot be satisfied*, Ezek. xvi. 28, 29. The soul may indeed feed, yea, and surfeit upon, but is can never satisfy itself from itself, or from any created good; nothing can ultimately determine and centre

Digitized by Google

the motions of a soul, but something superior to its own essence; which, whilst it misses of, it is as it were divided against itself, perpetually struggling and fluctuating, and travelling in pangs with some new design or other to be at rest; like the old lioness in the parable of Ezekiel, breeding up one whelp after another to be a lion wherein to confide, but disappointed in all; or like the poor discontented butterfly, lighting and catching every where but sticking no where, adoring something for a god to day, which it will be ready to fling into the fire to-morrow, after their manner of creating gods to themselves, whom the Poet brings in saying—

——— *Hodie mihi Jupiter esto,*
Cras mihi truncus eris, ficulnus, inutile lignum.

Neither the quantity, variety, or duration of any created objects, can possibly fill up that large and noble capacity wherewith God hath endued the rational soul; but having departed from its centre, and not knowing how to return to its original, it wanders up and down as it were in a wilderness, and having an imperfect glimmering sight at something better than what itself as yet either is or hath, but not being able to attain to it, it is miserably tormented, even as a man in a thirst which he cannot quench; yea, the more he runs up and down to seek water, the more is his thirst increased whilst he misses of it; so this distempered and distracted soul, whilst it seeks to quench its thirst at the creature-cistern does but inflame it, and in a continual pursuit of rest becomes most restless. That every unregenerate soul is in such a distressed, weary, restless state as I have been describing, appears most evidently by those famous gospel proclamations; one in *Isa.* lv. 1—3. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters;* where, by the thirsters are meant those unfixed, unsatisfied souls, as appears by the second verse; the other in *Matt.* xi. 28. *Come unto me, all ye that labour, &c.* where the promise

Digitized by Google

of giving rest does plainly imply the restless state of the persons invited. There are a certain horror and anguish in sin and wickedness, even long before it be swallowed up in hell; a certain vanity and vexation are folded up in all earthly enjoyments, though the same do not always sting and pierce the soul alike: so true is that famous aphorism of the prophet Isaiah, *There is no peace to the wicked.*

4*thly*, "Grace takes not away this thirst of the soul after happiness and plenary satisfaction." Love and desire, and a tendency towards blessedness, are so woven into the nature of the soul, and inlaid in the very essence of it, that she cannot posssibly put them off, however it is the work of grace to change and rectify them, as we shall see under the next head: the soul of man is a kind of immaterial fire, an inextinguishable activity, always necessarily catching at some object or other, in conjunction with which she thinks to be happy: and therefore, if she be rent from herself and the world, and be mortified to the love of fleshly and animal lusts, she will certainly cleave to some higher and more excellent object, as will more clearly appear by and by.—Grace does not stupify the soul as to its sense of its own indigency and poverty, but indeed makes it more abundantly sensible and importunate. There are more strong motions, and more powerful appetites in the godly soul towards its true and proper happiness, than in the ungodly and wicked. For the understanding of the regenerate soul is so enlightened, as that it doth present the will with an amiable and satisfactory object; which object therefore being more distinctly and perfectly apprehended, doth also apprehend or lay hold upon the soul, and attract her unto itself. *Oculi sunt in amore duces*, is most true of the eye of the soul, I mean the understanding, that first affects the heart with amorous passions. The first and fundamental error and mistake of the rational soul seems to lie here, even in the understanding; here lies the very root of the degenerate soul's distemper; and if this were thoroughly restored and healed, so as to present the will with pure and

Digitized by Google

proper ideas and representations of God, it might be hoped that this ductile faculty would not be long before it clave unto him entirely; nay, it may be doubted whether it could possibly resist the dictates of it. Now in the regenerate soul this faculty is repaired; yea, I may say, that the spirit of regeneration first of all spreads itself upon the understanding, and awakens in it a sense of self-indigency, and of the perfect, all-sufficient, suitable, and satisfactory fulness of God, in whom it sees all beauty, sweetness, and loveliness, in an infinitely ineffable manner wrapped up and contained; which will be so far from allaying the essential thirst of the soul, and stifling its eager gaspings, that it must needs give a mighty edge and ardour to its inclinations, and put it upon a more bold and earnest contention towards this glorious object, and charm the whole soul into the very arms of God. Therefore not thirsting in the text, must not be understood absolutely, as if grace did utterly extinguish the natural activities of the soul, and finish its propensions: but the regenerate and gracious soul doth not thirst in such sense, as thirst implies a want of a suitable good, or dissatisfaction, or includes torment properly so called. In this notion of thirst grace doth indeed quench it, as I intimated in the beginning of this discourse, and will further appear in the procedure of it. But as to this most essential thirst, this natural or vergency of the soul after a central rest and happiness, the same is so far from being extinguished or moderated either by divine grace, that it is greatly improved, and mightily inflamed thereby. I suppose I need not stay upon so popular a theme, and so acknowledged a subject; therefore I will but present you with the instances of holy David in the Old Testament and gracious Paul in the New, and so quit this head. I need not, I suppose, magnify the holy and divine frame of David's spirit by any rhetoric of mine; God himself hath given the amplest testimony, and fairest character of him that I remember to have been at any time given of any man, when he owns him for *a man after his own heart:* and what a longing, thirsting

Digitized by Google

soul this was, I need do no more to demonstrate than to turn you to some passages and professions of his own in his devout Psalms, such as *Ps.* xlii. 12. lxiii. 1. cxliii. 6. where he borrows the strongest inclinations that are to be found in the whole creation, to represent the devout ardours of his own soul; *As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. I stretch forth my hands unto thee; my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land:* yea, he seems like one that would swoon away for very longing: *Hear me speedily, O Lord, my spirit faileth; hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit; I lift up my soul unto thee; I flee unto thee, &c.* The very same temper you will find in holy Paul, that chosen vessel of God, if you peruse his Epistles, in all which you will meet with devout and strong breathings of the same kind; particularly *Phil,* iii. 11, 12, 13, 14. where he seems to be so thirsty after a state of heavenly perfection, that he longs after, if I mistake not the meaning of the 11th verse, something that yet he knows he cannot arrive at whilst he is in this world, even the resurrection of the dead, or such a perfect state of purity and holiness, as belongs to the children of the resurrection.

5thly, "The godly soul thirsteth no more after happiness in any creature, nor rests in any worldly thing, but in God alone." This particular consists also of two branches: the former and negative parts whereof seems to me to contain in it the scope and meaning of our Saviour, in these words which I am now interpreting. We have already seen that every unsanctified soul is restless, and craving, wavering, unsatisfied, inconstant to itself, and its choice; by reason of its natural activity, it is always spending itself in restless and giddy motions, as we observed under the first head of this discourse; but by reason of its ignorance, and unacquaintedness with the one supreme and all-suffi-

Digitized by Google

cient good, and the multiplicity of lower ends and objects, it is miserably distracted, and doth necessarily grapple with inevitable disturbances, in a continual unsteadiness, putting forth itself now towards one thing, anon to another, courting every thing, but matching with nothing; like a fickle lover, that is always enamoured with the last feature he saw; or a greedy merchant, that being equally in love with the pleasure of being at home, and the profit of being abroad, can stay long no where with any content, but has always most mind of the place where he is not, as he confesses of himself in the Poet,

Romæ Tybur amo ventosus, Tybure Romam.

The description that our Lord gives of the unclean spirit that is gone out of a man, *Matt.* xii. 43. seems very aptly to agree unto that unclean spirit that is in man, that being departed from God its, proper rest and habitation, walketh through dry and desart places, I mean, empty and unsatisfying creature-enjoyments, seeking rest but finding none. It was an accidental affliction of believers, but it is the natural and necessary affliction of every unbelieving and wicked soul, to wander up and down the world destitute, afflicted, tormented. Sinful self is so multiform, and that one root, the animal life, has such a world of branches, that it is impossible to administer due nourishment to them all; and yet they are all importunate and greedy suckers too: so that he must needs have a difficult task, and painful province, that is constrained to attend upon so many, so different, and yet all of them so impatient and imperious masters. But I shall lose ground by thus going backward to what I spoke to under the second head, except I can make this advantage of it, to enforce that which I was going to speak of, with the greater strength and clearer evidence. The case standing thus with the unregenerate soul, as we have seen in this short review, I now say, that divine grace allays the multifarious thirst of the soul after other waters,

Digitized by Google

filthy puddles, of which it could never yet drink deep, or if it drunk never so deep, could not be quenched; it determines the soul to one object, which before was rent in pieces amongst many. It does not destroy any of the natural powers, nor dry up the innate vigour of the soul, as I made evident under the last head, but it takes it off from the chase of all inferior ends, and inadequate objects, setting it upon a vehement pursuit of, and causing it to spend all those its powers not less vigorously, but far more rationally and satisfactorily upon that *objectum par amori*, the infinitely amiable and self-sufficient God. When the soul hath once met with this glorious object, is once mastered with this supreme good, is, by divine grace, ampliated and enlarged, it cannot, with any ease, stretch itself upon the creature any more; that is too scant and insufficient for it. Certainly the soul that understands its own original, nature, and capacity, and once comes to view itself in God, will see itself too large to be bounded by the narrow confines of self, or any creature, and too free to be bound down chained to any earthly object whatever. The world indeed may, yea, and will labour to take off the soul: *What is thy Beloved more than another beloved,* that thou art so fond of him? *Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?* Be content, here is hay and provender; stay with me this night; let us dally and make merry together a little longer. But these Syrenian songs are sung to a deaf ear; they cannot inchant the wise and devout soul that hath her senses rightly awakened, and exercised to discern between good and evil: O no, *I am sick of love,* and sick of every thing that keeps me from my Beloved; and therefore, however you may go about to defile me through fraud or force, through surprize or violence, yet I will not prostitute myself unto you. The gracious soul hath now discovered the most beautiful, perfect, and lovely object, even him whose name is love itself; which glorious vision hath so blasted and withered the choicest flowers in nature's garden, that they have now no more form nor

Digitized by Google

comeliness, beauty, or fragrancy, as to deserve to be desired; she hath tasted the pure and perfect sweetness of the fountain, which hath so imbittered all cistern-waters, that she finds no more thirstings in himself after them; which is that which our Saviour promised here, *shall never thirst.* A godly man cannot possibly be put off with any thing short of God; give him his God, or he dies; give him never so much fair usage in the world, never so much of earthly accommodations, they are not accommodated to his wants and thirsts, if they have not that God in them out of whom all worldly pleasures are even irksome and unpleasant, and all fleshly ease is tedious and painful: creature-employments are but a wearisome drudgery to a soul that is acquainted with the work of angels; and creature-enjoyments, in themselves considered, are very insignificant, if not burdensome, to a mind that is feelingly possessed of the chiefest good.

But here it will be seasonable to take into consideration a grand inquiry, *viz.* Whether a godly man may not be said in some sense to desire the creature, and how far such a person may be said to thirst after it. This I shall speak to as briefly, and yet as clearly as I can, in these four following particulars.

1. "All godly souls are not equally mortified to worldly loves, nor equally zealous and importunate lovers of God." This is so evident, *de facto*, that I need not insist upon it. Abraham seems to have been as much higher and nobler in spirit than his brother Lot, as Lot was more excellent than one of the ordinary sons of Adam, I had almost said, than one of the Sodomites amongst whom he dwelt. The one leaves all the pleasant and plentiful accommodations of his native country, at the very first call going out, not knowing whether he went, only relying upon the gracious guidance of him whom he followed; he seems to reckon all soils alike for his sojourning, and the whole habitable world as his own city and home, as appears by his readiness to break up house, and quit his present habita-

Digitized by Google

tion, rather than interfere with the conveniences of his nephew, *Gen.* xiii. 9. The other preferred a fruitful soil before a faithful society, and so in some sense his body before his soul; and yet, as if it had not been enough to make so unadvised a choice, he rests in it too; yea, though he was so severely reproved by the captivity that befel him there, whereby he was not so much called, as indeed carried away thence, yet this will not loosen him from his earthly conveniences, but he returns to Sodom, and from thence he will not part till he be fired out, nay, and then also it is with much lingering and lothness, *Gen.* xix. 16. It is evident I say, *de facto*, both from this and many other instances which I purposely omit, that it is so, that all godly souls are not equally careless of these earthly things, nor carried out with equal ardour and intemperance, as I may call it, towards the supreme and most glorious object; of which I can assign no fitter reason than this, because they are not all equally godly. For

2. "So far as grace prevails, and religion in the power of it acteth the soul in which it is planted, so far earthly loves decay and wither." For these two cannot stand together, *mutuo se pellunt*, the love of the world is inconsistent with the love of God, 1 *John* ii. 15. *If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* So far as any soul is sanctified, so far is it mortified also to all creature-enjoyments, to all things that are only fuel for the animal life, honour, ease, victory, plenty, liberty, relations, recreations, all the entertainments and delights in this lower life, yea, and this very life itself. Earthly and heavenly loves are to each other as the two ends of a pair of balances, save that they are never found equally poizing, as the one rises the other falls; just so much advantage as this gets, that loses. The more the sensual and self-central life thrives and prospers, and the creature is exalted, the more religion and the divine life faint and flag in the soul: and so certainly, on the other hand, the more divine grace prevails, and the divine life flourisheth in the soul, the more all earthly ob-

Digitized by Google

jects wither away and lose their beauty, and the soul cooleth and languisheth as to its love and desire of them. So far as a regenerate soul is unregenerate, so far she will be bustling after other lovers: which regeneration will not, I conceive, be thoroughly perfected, and therefore these lustings not utterly extinguished, till this mortal put on immortality; or, as the apostle speaks elsewhere, till *mortality be swallowed up of life*.

3. For the preventing of rash and uncharitable judging, I do affirm, that "divine and holy souls are often mistaken by them that behold their ordinary converse and actions in the body." They are thought sometimes to take pleasure in the creature, and to gratify the flesh, when indeed it is no such matter; but they take pleasure in the stamp of God, or the evidence of his fatherly love, which they contemplate therein, and do perhaps, most of all, serve a spiritual end, and an eternal design in those very actions which others may think are calculated for the gratification of the animal life, and the service of the flesh. Let not the purblind world, nor the self-befriending hypocrite, be judge, and it will appear that the truly godly soul counts nothing savoury to itself, but what represents, teaches, exhibits something of God, nothing pleasant but what hath a tendency to him: such a man doth not feel himself in his highest raptures, doth not taste himself in his noblest accomplishments, doth not seek himself in his most excellent performances; be not mistaken, he doth not so much thirst after long life, riches, friends, liberties, as indeed after God in them all; these all signify nothing to him, if they bring him not nearer to his God, and conduce to his real and spiritual happiness. Yea, possibly, in his most suspicious actions, and those that seem most alien from religion, and most designed to please the flesh, he may be highly spiritual and pure: so was our blessed Saviour we know, even in his conversing with scandalous sinners, eating and drinking with publicans, and notorious offenders, however he was traduced by a proud and hypocritical generation; and so I doubt

Digitized by Google

not is many a good christian, according to his measure, pure as Christ was pure. When a painted hypocrite, who can guess at the temper of others no other way but by what he finds in himself, and by what he should be and do, if he were under the same circumstances, comes to be judge of the actions or disposition of one who is transformed into the image of the divine freedom and benignity, you may easily imagine what a perverse sentence he will pass. It needs not seem very strange, methinks, in spirituals, no more than it is in corporeals, that the most sound and healthful constitutions should, upon a lawful call, adventure themselves further than the crazy and sickly, and familiarly converse with and handle, yea, and make good work with those briers and thorns, which would prove a snare, or a wound, or a pricking temptation to others. If it were possible for any man to arrive at the purity and perfection of his Saviour, and his firm and immoveable radication in true goodness, he would find himself so wholly dead to sin, and all temptations, and motions thereunto, that he would be able to dare to walk upon the most boisterous waves, without fear of being swallowed up in them, and to take up in his hands the most venemous serpent, not dreading the sting of it.—However, the apprehensions and actions of more perfect and refined souls are not rashly to be judged; for they may easily be mistaken, either by the unhallowed hypocrite, or the more imperfect and impotent saint.

4. To answer yet more fully, I do affirm, that "no truly religious soul in the world doth so thirst after the creature, as to place its main happiness in it, or to seek satisfaction from it." However, all holy souls may not be alike weaned from the world, nor equally loving of God, however the affections and actions of some may really be, and of others may seem to be too gross and fleshly, yet no one of all these, in whom this new and divine life is indeed found, doth erect a self-supremacy in his own soul, nor take his full and complete rest and happiness to consist in any creature-communion whatsoever. Surely this of not

Digitized by Google

thirsting is so far a consequent of true religion, as that no religious soul in the world can be content to exchange the presence of God, and acquaintance with him, for any thing, for all things besides; or, if you will, plainly thus, no such person could be content, no, not for all the world, the glory of heaven not excepted, if it may be supposed, to be wicked and ungodly: so that by thirsting here must not be meant some weak wishings, and fainter propensions of the soul towards created objects; for certainly there is no soul found in a body of the earth, in which these are not found, no, nor yet some more lively and stronger strugglings after them, (how strong they may be in a good christian, and yet predominated over by grace, we cannot punctually determine;) but, by thirsting here, must be meant the most quick and powerful breathings, the highest and strongest ardencies, the predominant and victorious motions and desires of the soul, which do, as it were, fold up the whole soul, and lead all its powers and faculties with it into a grateful captivity. Thus shall he thirst no more, who hath once drunk of these waters which flow forth from the presence of the Lord of life, and which the blessed Redeemer of the world is here said to give.

But, which is the latter branch of this particular, this inspired soul which we have been describing, thirsteth after his happiness in God alone, that is in the enjoyment of him. We have already seen that grace does not destroy the natural and essential longings of the soul after a satisfactory good, but rather enhance them, and that the godly soul is most thirsty of all, but not with a creature-thirst, as is before proved; it remains then, that his thirsting after rest and happiness is terminated upon God alone. And so indeed it appears in the instances of holy men recorded in holy writ, which I have under the last head spoke something to, and so partly prevented myself. But unto those passages and professions which I quoted out of *Ps.* xlii. 1, 2, *&c.* you may add such as *Ps.* iv. 6. which is the voice of every godly soul; *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance*

Digitized by Google

upon us: Ps. xxxix. 6, 7. *Surely every man walketh in a vain shew; surely they are disquieted in vain; he heapeth up riches, &c. And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee:* where you have the different seekings and centrings of the ungodly, and of the godly soul, elegantly described. Lastly, You may, in *Ps.* lxxiii. 25. again view the term or end of the godly man's ambition; *Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee!* Which translation of the words doth lively set out the godly man's end, and aim, and object, and happiness, and indeed his all: or if we translate, perhaps more fitly, with Mollerus, yet they afford us the same doctrine, *Who will give me to be in heaven and with thee? on earth I desire nothing.*

And thus have we despatched the fifth proposition, *viz.* that the godly soul thirsteth no more after happiness in any creature, or rest in any worldly thing; and come to the the sixth and last particular designed for the explication of this not thirsting of the religious soul, which is this.

In the enjoyment of God, this soul is at rest, is fully satisfied. I do not mean so satisfied as not to thirst after any more of him, as I have often hinted; but so satisfied, as to be perfectly matched with an object transcendently adequate to all its faculties, and their respective capacities; and so satisfied as to have peace and joy, and triumph in him. These two I will speak something to distinctly, and so pass on.

Now for the better understanding of the first of these it should be noted, that the reasonable soul and the faculties of it are of a vast, large, and noble capacity. It is universally granted by all that are not Sadducees, that the capacity of angels is very great and noble; and that the condition of the human soul is not much inferior to it, may, I think, be gathered from the Psalmist's words, *Ps.* viii. 5. *Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels:* which words, although the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews applies to Christ, *Heb.* ii. 9. and indeed they have a marvellous apt-

Digitized by Google

ness to him, according to the Dutch translation, which runs thus, *We see Jesus crowned with glory and honour, who was become a little lesser than the angels, by reason of the sufferings of death; that he should, by the grace of God, &c.*— Yet I see nothing hindering but that they may be well applied to the excellent condition of man by creation; especially considering that many other passages of the Old Testament have a double aspect, one more ordinary and obvious, which was most clearly understood by the prophet that wrote them; the other more abstruse and mysterious, principally intended by that Spirit that inspired him, and only to be understood by the revelation of the same Spirit: such are those passages, I conceive, which are found in *Isa.* vii. 14. *Hosea* xi. 1. interpreted by the Evangelist, *Matt.* i. 23. and ii. 15. as also *Jer.* xxxi. 15. with many more. But however it goes with that text, and whether or no the souls of men be so near of kindred to the angels, as to their own comprehensions; yet, that they are capable of a most noble and excellent happiness, and much allied to God himself, doth appear from such texts of scripture as doth require them to be *holy as God is holy*; to be *perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect.* Neither need it seem to any incredible, that the rational soul should be so capacious; for we are no more to judge of the angelical temper, and noble actings of the separated soul, by what we see it to be and do in this body of flesh, than one can judge of the prowess and puissance of a renowned warrior at the head of an army, by what we discern in him when he lies bound in chains, or of the power and splendor of the sun, by what we discern of it when it is eclipsed, or miserably beclouded; or if you will, no more than we can judge of a man by the imperfections, stammerings, and weaknesses of his childhood: for so the apostle Paul seems to state the case, 1 *Cor.* xiii. 10, 11. plainly implying, that the present and future condition of the soul is comparable to the minority and adult state of a man; as if he had said, "the soul, in its future and separate state, will act as much

Digitized by Google

nobler than what it doth now, as the soul of the wisest and discreetest man in the world acteth more nobly than what it did when he was a child:" yea, and what is still more to our present purpose, he seems clearly to intimate in the 12th verse, that this improvement shall happen, not so much by the more evident propounding of the object, as by the more ample illumination and corroboration of the faculties. In the next place it will be easily inferred, that all created good is too scant and insufficient for this capacious spirit of man; too short a bed to stretch itself upon; nay, it cannot contract itself so as to be accommodated to any wordly good, without pain and anguish. From both which it will be naturally and necessarily concluded, that God alone is that adequate object which can match the soul of man, and satisfy it, as being infinitely superior and transcendent to it. The enjoyment of God is that ultimate end, and perfect good that is only able to fix the spirit of man; which otherwise, not meeting with its match, would be tossed to and fro, and labour under perpetual disquietude and restless fluctuations. God is that almighty goodness and sweetness, who alone is able to draw out all the appetites of the soul unto himself, satisfy all its cravings, charm all its restless motions, and cause all its faculties, in the purest and most complacential manner, to conspire together to give up themselves wholly and entirely to himself.

Secondly, From this conjunction with omnipotent goodness, ariseth pure peace, yea, joy and triumph, to the religious soul. For the clearer understanding of this, I should premise, what some have wisely observed, that there is a natural congruity between God and the soul, she being a spiritual substance and he being a spiritual good, only suitable unto her. This seems to be evident by experience; for we see how difficult, I had almost said, impossible it is, utterly to eradicate and extinguish all sense of virtue and goodness out of the soul of man; to which purpose I think our divines generally speak, when they allow of some holy relics, something of the image of God remaining in the

Digitized by Google

most degenerate souls, however all men have reduced the same to a very poor and inconsiderable spark, and many have raked that very spark under ashes too, and imprisoned that remainder of truth in unrighteousness, living according to those unnatural and foreign principles and conceptions that they have unhappily drunk in. Hence it is, I suppose, that sin and wickedness are so often stiled the defilement of the soul: now, we know, that whatsoever defileth, is adventitious and improper; and hence it is, that sin many times stings and wounds the consciences of those that take most pleasure in it, namely, being so perfectly contrary to this noble and inbred sense of the soul; allowing, then, this natural sympathy that the soul of man hath with its Creator, it will be easy to give a philosophical account of that peace, joy, and triumph, of which the soul must needs be possesed or rather indeed transported with, that finds and feels itself in conjunction with its centre, and in the dearest embraces of its Creator. It need not seem strange, that the soul should mightily congratulate itself in its arrival at its own haven; nay, it were strange if it should not dissolve into secret joy and pleasure in the hearty entertainment of so blessed and proper a guest as God is unto it; nay, indeed it were unreasonable to imagine, that the conjunction of such noble and discerning faculties with so perfect and proper an object, should not beget the truest and sincerest delight and pleasure imaginable. The delights of an earthly and sensual mind are filthy and dreggy, in comparison of these pleasures of the refined and purified soul, which must needs live most gracefully, triumphantly, and deliciously, when it converseth with God most intimately. Certainly if there be any innocent and well-natured self-feeling, or self-pleasing, in the world, this is it; though indeed to speak truly, it deserves a better name. It cannot be but that a godly soul, being in its right senses, should taste a sweetness in these pure and divine accomplishments wrought in it by the eternal Spirit of righteousness; which self-pleasing is no more blameable, than that natural pleasure

Digitized by Google

which every creature finds in the enjoyment of that which is most aptly accommodated to its neces ities, and most perfective of its happiness; which pleasure, I say, ariseth in the soul from its sensible union with God in the spirit, and enjoyment of him: by which enjoyment of God, you will easily perceive that I do not mean the bare pardon of sin, or an abstract justification; for this is not the attainment that is perfective of the soul, neither could it alone, if we could suppose it alone, fill up the capacities of the soul, or make it happy, however the rapturous joys of the unprincipled hypocrite spring principally from the opinion and false apprehension of this; which indeed I take to be a notable, though not infallible, sign of a mercenary, low-spirited, and fleshly minded christian: but by it I mean the soul's being really regenerated into the image of God, consisting in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and her implantation into the root Christ Jesus, by which she partakes of his divine life, power, and Spirit.

And yet besides this, I conceive there is a more theological account to be given of these joys and pleasures which the renewed soul doth so plentifully reap upon her return to God, from whom she had so long straggled by sin and wickedness. For the *God of hope filleth* the godly soul *with all peace and joy in believing*, Rom. xv. 13. Christ doth on purpose speak words to the hearts of his desciples, that *their joy may be full*, John xv. 11. But whether the most benign and gracious Father of spirits doth immediately from himself inspire the holy soul with divine joys and pleasures, kindled, as I may say, with nothing but his own breath; or whether he bring them to his holy mountain, and into his house of prayer, and by that, or any other the like means, make them joyful, and of glad heart, as in the day of a solemn festival, as he hath promised to do, *Isa.* lvi. 7. and *Isa.* xxv. 6. however it be, I say, sure it is that he frequently puts a gladness into their hearts beyond that of the harvest or the vintage, *Ps.* iv. 7. and makes them to rejoice with *joy unspeakable and full of glory*, 1 Peter i. 8.

Digitized by Google

Having now unfolded the meaning of the gracious soul's not thirsting any more, I should pass to the last thing contained in the text; but finding myself oppressed in my spirit by the consideration of this necessary consequent of true religion, when I compare the temper of christians with it, I must crave leave to stay a little and breathe. And what shall I breathe but a sad and bitter complaint over that low, earthly, selfish, greedy spirit which actuateth the world at this day, yea, and the generality of the professors of that sacred religion which we call christianity. Alas! what a company of thieves and murderers, I mean, base and sensual loves and lusts, lodge in those very souls who would be taken for temples consecrated to the name, and honour, and inhabitation of the eternal God, the Spirit of truth and holiness. O what pity is it that the precious souls of men, yea, and of christians, the best of men, that are all capable of so glorious a liberty, so high and honourable a happiness, should be bound down under such vile and sordid lusts, feeding upon dust and gravel, to whom the hidden Manna is freely offered, and God himself is ready to become a banquet! And O what a shame is it for those who profess themselves children of God, disciples of the most holy Jesus, and heirs of his pure and undefiled kingdom of heaven; for these, I say, willingly and greedily to roll themselves in filthy and brutish sensualities, to set up that on high in their souls, which was made to be under their bodies, and so to love and live as if they studied to have no affinity at all, but would be as unlike as they could to that God, and Redeemer, and unfit for that inheritance! How often shall it be protested to the christian world, by men of the greatest devotion and seriousness, that it is utterly mad, and perfectly vain, to dream of entering into the kingdom of heaven hereafter, except the kingdom of heaven enter into our souls during their union with these bodies? How long shall the Son of God, who came into the world on purpose to be the most glorious example of true and divine purity, exact and perfect self-denial, and mortification, how

Digitized by Google

long shall he lie by in his word as an antiquated pattern only cut out for the apostolical ages of the world, and only suited to some few morose and melancholic men? Is it not a monstrous spectacle, and to be hissed out of the world with the greatest indignation, a covetous, voluptuous, ambitious, sensual saint? With what face can we pretend to true religion, or a feeling acquaintance with God, and the things of his personal service and kingdom, whilst the continual bleatings and lowings of our souls after created good do bewray us so manifestly, and proclaim before all the world that the beast, the brutish life, is still powerful in us? *If ye seek me,* saith Christ to his followers, as well as he did once to his persecutors, *then let these go;* let go the hold of these earthly objects, let vanish these worldly joys and toys; *withhold your throat from thirst, and your feet from being unshod,* and come follow me only, and ye shall have treasure in heaven; for he that will not deny all for me, is not worthy of me. But, *O curvæ in terras animæ, &c.* Ah sad and dreadful fall, that hath so miserably cramped this royal offspring, and made the King's son to be a lame Mephibosheth! Ah doleful apostasy! How are the sons of the morning become brats of darkness, and the heirs of heaven vassals and drudges to earth! How is the King's daughter unequally yoked with a churlish Nabal, that continually checketh her more divine and generous motions! *How unhappily art thou matched, O my soul!* And yet, alas! I see it is too properly a marriage; for thou hast clean forgotten *thine own people, and thy Father's house.* Take up, O take up a lamentation, thou virgin, daughter of the God of Zion: sometimes indeed a virgin, but now, alas! no longer a virgin, but miserably married to an unworthy mate, that can never be able to match thy faculties, nor maintain thee according to the grandeur of thy birth, or the necessary pomp of thy expences, and way of living; nay, thou art become not only a miserable wife, but, in so being, thou art also a wicked adulteress, prostituting thyself to the very vilest of thy lawful husband's servants: if thou be not

Digitized by Google

incestuous, it is no thank to thee, there being nothing in this world so near of kin to thee, as to make way for incest. *Return, return, O Shulamite, return, return; put away thine adulteries from between thy breasts, and so shall the king yet again greatly desire thy beauty;* for so he hath promised, *Jer.* iii. 21. that when there shall be a voice heard upon the high places, weeping, and supplications of the children of Israel, because they have perverted their way, and forgotten the Lord their God, and the backsliding children shall return, that then he *will heal their backslidings.*

CHAP. VIII.

The term or end of religion, eternal life, considered in a double notion: First, as it signifies the essential happiness of the soul. The second, as it takes in many glorious appendixes. The former more fully described; the latter more briefly. The noble and genuine breathings of the godly soul after, and springing up into the former; in what sense she may be said to desire the latter. The argument drawn from the example of Christ. Moses and Paul moderated. A general answer given to the query. It ends in a serious exhortation made to christians, to live and love more spiritually, more suitably to the nature of souls, redeemed souls, resulting from the whole discourse.

I AM now come to the last thing whereby this most noble principle is described, *viz.* the term or end of it; and that is said here in the text to be *everlasting life.* This is the highst pitch of perfection, unto which the new creature is continually growing up; which the apostle Paul hath expressed with as much grand eloquence as words are able to magnify it, calling it *the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:* this is that unbounded ocean which

Digitized by Google

this living fountain, by so many incessant issues, and unwearied streamings, perpetually endeavours to empty itself into, or rather to unbosom itself in. Now what this is, we must confess with the apostle John, and indeed we have more reason to make such a confession than he had, that it doth not yet appear, *viz.* neither fully nor distinctly: but yet, since I am thus cast upon the contemplation of it, it will be a pertinent piece of pleasure a little to enquire into it; and though it surpass the power and skill of all created comprehensions to take the just dimensions, and faithfully give in the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of it; yet we may essay to walk about this heavenly Jerusalem, as the Psalmist speaks of the earthly, *and tell the towers thereof, mark her walls, consider her palaces,* that we may tell it to the generation following.

1. Then we will consider *eternal life* in the most proper notion of it, as it implies the essential happiness of the soul; and so it is no other that the soul's pure, perfect, and established state. By a state I do designedly disparage that grosser notion of a place, as that which scarce deserves to enter into the description of such a glory, or, at best, will obtain but a very low room there: by purity I do purposely explode that carnal ease, rest, immunity, affluence of sensual delights, accommodated only to the animal life; which last Mahometans, and the former too many professed christians, and the Jews almost, generally do dream of, and judge heaven to be. By perfection I do distinguish it from the best state which the best men upon earth can possibly be in. So then I take eternal life in the primary and most proper notion of it to be full, and perfect, and everlasting enjoyment of God, communion with him, and a most blissful conformity of all the powers and faculties of the soul to that eternal goodness, truth, and love, as far as it is or may become capable of the communications of the divinity.—This life was, at the highest rate imaginable, purchased by our ever blessed Lord and Saviour in the days of his flesh, and here in the text promised to every believing soul.—

Digitized by Google

Now, inasmuch as we are ignorant both of the present capacity of our own faculties, how large they are, and much more ignorant, how much more large and ample they may be made, on purpose to receive the more rich and plentiful communications of the divine life and image, therefore can we not comprehend either the transcendant life, happiness, and glory, or that degree of sancity and blessedness which the believing soul may be advanced unto in another world. The Popish schoolmen nicely dispute about the sight of God, and the love of God, to wit, in whether of these the formal blessedness of the soul consisteth, ill separating those whom God hath so firmly joined together, as if it were possible that either a blind love, or a jejune and unaffectionate speculation, could render a soul entirely happy: but it is much safer to say, that the happiness and eternal life of the soul standeth in the possession or fruition of God; and this doth necessarily import the proper perfection of every faculty. Nothing can be the formal happiness of a spirit that is either inferior or extrinsical to it; it must be something divine, and that wrought into the very nature and temper of it. I doubt not to affirm, that if the soul of man were possibly advanced, so as to receive adoration or divine power, yet if it were in the mean time void of divine dispositions, and a god-like nature; it were far from being glorified, and made happy as to its capacity. What health is to the body, that is holiness to the soul; which haply the apostle alludes to when speaks of the *spirit of a sound mind*, 2 Tim. i. 7.

2. There is another notion of *eternal life* which some contend for, by which they mean not barely the essential happiness of the soul, but that with the addition of many suitable and glorious circumstances, the essential happiness of the soul, as it is attended with the appendixes of a glorified body, the beholding of Christ, the amicable society of angels, freedom from temptations, the knowledge of the secrets of nature and providence, and some such like: to which may be also added, though of a lower degree, open absolution, or a visible deliverance of the saints out of the

Digitized by Google

overthrow of the wicked at the conflagration of the world, power over devils, eminence of place, enjoyment of friends, and some other like. Now let us briefly consider what tendencies there are in the religious soul towards each of these: and here I must crave leave to speak jointly both of the end, and of the motion thereunto; though it may be thought that the former only falls fairly under our present consideration.

First then, I suppose that *eternal life* in the first sense of it is intended here, to wit, the essential happiness of the soul, or its perfect and everlasting enjoyment of God. For the description is here made of religion itself in the abstract, or that principle of divine life which Christ Jesus implanted in the soul; and being so considered, it is hard to conceive how that should spring up into any of these appendant circumstances, or into any thing but the completion and perfection of itself; though the religious soul, taken in the concrete, possible may. And indeed though we should allow, which we shall take into consideration under the next head, that many of those high scriptural phrases which are brought to describe the future condition of believing souls, do principally respect the appendixes of its essential happiness, (as a kingdom, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, an inheritance reserved, a place prepared, and the like) yet it seems very unnatural to interpret this phrase, *life*, and *eternal life*, any otherwise than of that which I call the essential happiness of the soul: but if we interpret it of this, the sense is very fair and easy; thus this principle of divine life is continually endeavouring to grow up to its just altitude, to advance itself unto a triumphant state, even as all other principles of life do naturally tend towards a final accomplishment, and ultimate perfection. Carnal self, or the animal life, may be indeed said to be a well of water too, poisonous water; but that springs up into a sensual life, popular applause, self-accommodations; or if you will in the apostle's phrase, into the fulfilment of the lusts of the flesh. This I speak only by way of illustra-

Digitized by Google

tory opposition: for, to speak more properly, this corrupt principle hath in it the central force of death and hell, and is always tumbling downward; whereas this divine principle is always climbing upward: but they do both agree in this, that they do both seek their own gratifications, and study to acquire their respective perfections. The everlasting and most glorious enjoyment of God is certainly most perfective of the soul; and therefore is most properly and most deservingly said to be its *eternal life*, according to that of our Saviour, *John* xvii. 3. Now this *eternal life* is not a thing specifically different from religion, or the image of God, or the divine life, but indeed the greatest height, and the most possible perfection of itself: even as the sun at noon-day is not a light really distinct from what it was in the first dawnings of the morning, but a different degree, and far more glorious state; which seems to be the very similitude whereby the Spirit of God illustrateth the matter in hand, *Prov.* iv. 18. or, as a man of perfect age is not a distinct species from a child, but much more complete and excellent in that species; to which the apostle refers, treating of this subject, 1 *Cor.* xiii. 11. Man hath not two distinct kinds of happiness in the two distinct worlds, that he is made to live in; but one and the same thing is his blessedness in both, which, as I said before must needs be the enjoyment of God. The translation made of the text is very suitable to this notion; for this divine principle is said to spring up, not unto but into everlasting life, *q. d.* it springs up till it be swallowed up into the perfect knowledge, love, and enjoyment of God. Even as youth is swallowed up in manhood, so this grace is swallowed up in glory, and not so much abolished, as indeed perfected.

By this phrase the genius of true religion, and excellent temper of the truly religious soul, is most lively described. This is the soul that, being in some measure delivered from its unnatural bondage, and freed from its unhappy confinement, now spreads itself in God, lifts up itself unto him, stretches itself upon him, is not content with a

Digitized by Google

heaven merely to come, but brings down a heaven into itself, by carrying up itself unto, and after the God of heaven. God is become great, only great in the eye of such a christian; he is indeed become all things to him; whilst this principle is rightly and actually predominant in him, he knows no interest but to thrive and grow great in God; no will but to serve the will, and comply with the mind of God; no end, but to be united to God; no business, but to display and reflect the glory and perfections of God upon the earth; the main business of his life, I say, is to serve him, the main ambition of his soul to be like unto him, and his main happiness in this world to be united to him, and in the world to come, to be swallowed up in him; in this world to know, and love, and rest, and delight in, and enjoy God more than all things, and in the world to come to enjoy him more than so. The gladsome growings up of the tender flowers unto the friendly sun, being once powerfully surprized with his precious and benign influences, and the cheerful haste with which the sympathetic needle so amorously pursues the inchanting loadstone, being once rightly touched and affected with it, do a little, though but a little, resemble and represent the motions of a spirit impregnated with this divine principle, and strongly impressed with the image and stamp of God: he puts in his hand by the hole of the door, and the bowels of the espoused soul are presently moved, yea, melted for him, *Cant.* v. 4. He casts the skirt of his garment, the mantle of his love, and presently the converted soul leaves all to follow him. Faith, hope, and love, are knitting and springing graces, and this eternal life is the end and perfection of them all; not that any one of them, I conceive, shall be utterly incassated and abolished, as some conclude concerning the two former, though without good ground, I think, from the apostle's words, 1 *Cor.* xiii. 13. But faith will be ripened into the most firm and undisturbed confidence, affiance, and acquiescence in God; hope will be advanced into a more cheerful, powerful, and confident expectation, having for its object the

Digitized by Google

perpetuation of the soul's felicity; and love will become much more loving, and more clearly distinguishable from the imperfect longings and languishings of this present state, when it shall flower up into pure delights and complacencies, resting and glorying in the arms of its adequate, satisfactory, and eternal object. The faith of the hypocrite, and indeed his hope too, is still springing up into self-preservation, deliverance, liberty, a splendid and pompous state of the church, (that is, of his own party) or some such thing as will gratify the animal life, and there it terminates; but the faith of the sincere and religious soul springs up into eternal life; it knows no term but *the salvation of the soul*, 1 Pet. i. 9. As its hope knows no accomplishment but a state of god-like purity and perfection, 1 *John* iii. 3. The mere natural man lives within himself, within a circle of his own, and cannot get out; whether he eat, or drink, or pray, or be zealous for the popular pulling down of the political Antichrist, he is still in his own circle, he is still sacrificing in all this to that great *helluo*, the animal life, as I have already made evident: but the godly soul is disinterested of self, and so is still contriving the advancement of a nobler life within itself, and moving towards God as its supreme and all-sufficient good. Give a saint all that the whole world can afford, he cannot fix, nor settle, nor centre here: God hath put into him a holy restless appetite after an higher good, which he would rather be, than what he is. I know indeed that the soul that is thus divinely free may be hindered in its flight; but it will deliver itself from the clog at length: you may choke and dam up the streamings of this fountain perhaps, but they will burst out again; you may cast ashes upon this pure fire for a time, but it will flame out again: such a damp cannot arise, no not from hell itself, as to extinguish it. The Philistines, I remember, stopped the wells of water which Abraham had digged in Gerar, *and filled them with earth*, Gen. xxvi. 15 But this well of water which God diggeth in the holy and humble soul, cannot be stopped, neither by the devil, that king of

Digitized by Google

Gerar, that is, of wonderings, *Job* i. 7. nor by any of his servants, but it will find vent upward: though you endeavour to fill it with earth, which indeed is the likeliest to choke it, (for *amor rerum terrenarum est viscus spiritualium pennarum)* though you cast dust and gravel of earthly pleasures, profits, or preferments into it, yet it is a well of living water, and will work its passage out. The hungerings of the godly soul are not, cannot be satisfied, till it come to feed upon the hidden Manna, nor its thirstings quenched, till it come to be swallowed up in the unbounded ocean of life and love.

But I see I cannot divide *springing up* from *eternal life*, nor pursue the term of religion, but I must also take in the motion of the religious soul, whereby it pursues it, which I have already handled in my discourse; therefore I will quit this head, and take a short view of the second.

The secondary and more improper notion of eternal life, I told you, was that which takes in the circumstances or appendices of it. And here we must needs allow, that the holy scriptures openly avouch some of these circumstances, as those especially of the first rank that I named, of some of which it seems to make great account; and possibly the scripture may somewhere or other imply all the rest, even those of the inferior rank. Again, we will allow, that many of those phrases which the scripture uses to describe the blessed state of the other world, principally respect these appendices of the soul's essential happiness: such perhaps are the *crown of righteousness* mentioned by the apostle, 1 *Tim.* iv. 8. *The prize of the high calling*, mentioned by the same apostle, *Phil.* iii. 14. *The house which is from heaven*, spoken of 2 *Cor.* vi. 2. *A kingdom, an incorruptible inheritance, a place prepared, mansions, a reward, praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*, 1 Peter i. 7. and that *glory, honour, and peace*, spoken of by the apostle Paul, *Rom.* ii. 10. These are all scripture descriptions of the other state, and I suppose we may grant them to have a peculiar reference to this

Digitized by Google

secondary and preter-essential happiness of the soul: though I know not any necessity there is to be so liberal in our concessions; for it may be fairly said concerning all, or most of them, that the design of these phrases is not so much to establish this less proper notion, or to point out to the circumstances of the glorified state, as to insinuate how much more ample and glorious that state shall be than this in which we now are; as a prize is looked upon as somewhat more excellent than what is done or expended to acquire it, (it must needs be so esteemed by runners and wrestlers) a kingdom is a more glorious state than that of subjection, and an inheritance is incomparably more ample than the pension that is allowed the heir in his minority.

But these things being conceded, it doth not appear how far, or under what notion, the religious soul, as such, doth spring up into these additional glories, and thirst after them. I know there are many that speak very highly of these appendices, and allow the godly soul a very high and irrespective valuation of them: and this they do principally infer from the example of Christ himself, as also of Moses and Paul. Give me leave, therefore, to suggest something, not to enervate, but to moderate the argument drawn from these persons; and, after that, I shall briefly lay down what I conceive to be most scriptural and rational in this matter.

1. As for the example of Christ, it seems to make not much for them in this matter. For however the text is very plain, that *for the joy that was set before him, he endureth the cross*; and this joy seems plainly to be his session *at the right hand of God*, Heb. xii. 2. Yet, if by this joy we understand a more full and glorious possession of God, and a more excellent exaltation of his human nature to a more free fruition of the divine, then it cannot be applied to any thing but the sprinkling up of the gracious soul into its essential happiness; which I have already contended for, as being the proper genius of such a soul: or if by this joy and throne we understand the power that Christ foresaw he should be vested with, of leading captivity cap-

Digitized by Google

tive, trampling under feet the powers of hell and darkness, and procuring gifts for men, which seems to me to be the most likely, then it belongs not at all to men, neither can this example be drawn into imitation.

As for the instance of Moses, who is said to have had *respect to the recompence of the reward*, Heb. xi. 26. It is not yet granted, that that *recompence of reward* relates principally to these appendants of the soul's essential happiness, neither can it, I suppose, be evinced: but though I should also allow that, which I incline to do, yet all that can be inferred from it is but a respect that Moses had, as our translation well renders it, or some account, which he in his sufferings made of this recompence; which was a very warrantable contemplation.

The apostle Paul indeed doth openly profess that he looked for, and desired the coming of Christ from heaven, upon the account of that glorious body which he would then clothe him with, *Phil.* iii. 20, 21. and so he might sure, and yet not desire it principally and primarily, but secondarily, and with reference.

And this leads me to the general answer that I was preparing to give, which is this. Some of these circumstances which I have named, especially that of the glorified body, may be reduced to the essential happiness of the soul, or include in it, so that the soul could not otherwise be perfectly happy. It is the vote of all divines I think, that a christian is not completely happy, till he consits of a soul and body both glorified. And indeed considering the dear affection, and essential aptitude that God hath planted in the human soul for a body, we cannot well conceive how she should be perfectly happy without one: and this earthly body is, alas! an unequal yoke-fellow, in which she is half stifled, and rather buried, than conveniently lodged; so that it seems necessary even to her essential happiness, that she should have some more heavenly and glorious body, wherein she may commodiously and pleasantly exert her innate powers, and whereby she may also express her-

Digitized by Google

self in a spiritual and nobler manner, suitable to her own natural dignity and vigour, and to her infinitely amiable most beloved object.

Concerning the rest of the circumstances which cannot be thus reduced, I conceive that such of them as are necessary to the essential happiness of the soul, by way of subserviency, may be eyed, and desired, and thirsted after secondarily, and with reference, as I said before, that is, under this notion only, as they are subservient to that essential blessedness; I confess I do not understand under what notion a religious soul can lift up itself unto them, I mean, not so far forth as it is holy and religious, and acts suitably to that divine principle which the Father of spirits, or rather the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath implanted in it. And if there be any other circumstance which cannot be reduced to one of these kinds, I suppose it may be reckoned amongst the objects and gratifications of the animal life, and not to make up any part of the godly man's heaven, or that eternal life which religion springs up into: for I do easily imagine, that a fleshly fancy may verily be mightily ravished with the desire of such a heaven as is suitable to it; and that a mere animal man may be as heartily desirous to be in such a kingdom of God as he hath shaped out to himself, as he is utterly unwilling that the true kingdom of God (such as the apostle describes, *Rom.* xiv. 17. consisting *in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost)* should be in him. If our continual cry be after safety, self-preservation, liberty, redemption, and deliverance from those things only that oppress and grieve our fleshly interest, and our thirstings principally terminated in knowledge, though it be of God himself, freedom from condemnation, power over devils, yea, or any visible pomp, glory, or splendor, though it be of never so ethereal and heavenly a nature, what do we more than others? what is all this more than may naturally spring up from the animal life, and be ultimately resolved into carnal self?

Digitized by Google

Wherefore, as a result from the whole discourse, especially from this last part of it, let me earnestly intreat all the professors of this holy religion, which the blessed Messiah Christ Jesus hath so dearly bought for the world, and so clearly revealed in it, not to value themselves by any thing which the power of natural self-love may exeit or desire, perform or expect, nor by any thing below the image of God, and the internal and transforming manifestations of Christ Jesus in them; the perfection of which is eternal life, in the most proper and true notion of it, as you have heard. I know that I have often suggested the same lesson in this short treatise, but I know also that I can never inculcate it often enough; nay, the eloquence of angels is not sufficient to imprint it upon the hearts of men. Possibly it may startle some hypocritical professors, and carnal gospellers, (God grant it may effectually!) and make the ears of many that hear it to tingle, but yet I will proclaim it, "It is impossible for a man to desire not only the things of this world, which St. James speaks of, chap. iv. 3.) but even heaven itself, to consume it upon his lusts; and he may as truly be making provision for the flesh, to fulfil it in the lusts thereof, in longing after a kind of self-salvation, as in eating, and drinking, and rising up to play." Certainly a true christian spirit, rightly invigorated and actuated by this divine and potent principle, christian religion, cannot look upon heaven as merely future, or as something perfectly distinct from him; but he eyes it as life, eternal life, the perfection of the purest and divine life communicable to a soul, and is daily thirsting after it, or rather, as it is in the text, growing up into it. I know that heaven is sometimes called a rest, in opposition to the dissatisfaction of the uncentred and unbelieving soul; but, in opposition to a sluggish, inert, and dormient rest, it is here said to be *life, eternal life.* Let us shew ourselves to be living christians, by springing up into the utmost consummation of life: let it appear that Christ Jesus, the Prince of life, who was manifested on purpose *to take away our sins,* 1 John iii. 5.

Digitized by Google

hath not only covered our shame, and, as it were, embalmed our dead souls, to keep them from putrefaction, and strewed them with the flowers of his merits, to take away their noisome stink from the nostrils of his Father, but hath truly advanced, re-instated, and made to flourish the souls that sin had so miserably degraded and defloured. Deliver yourselves, O immortal souls! from all those unsuitable and unseemly cares, studies, and joys, from all those low and particular ends and lusts, which do not only pinch and straiten but even debase and debauch you: let it not be said that the king of Sodom made Abraham rich; that your main delight, happiness, and contentment are derived from any prosperous, plentiful, peaceable, pompous state, any thing that may be called a self-accommodation, either in the world that now is, or that which is to come; but from the righteousness of faith, and your vital union with the Father and the Son: to whom, in the unity of the Spirit be honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

COMMUNION WITH THE DEITY.

1 JOHN i. 3.

OUR FELLOWSHIP IS WITH THE FATHER, AND WITH HIS SON JESUS CHRIST.

THESE words express the way of a christian's living, and that kind of converse, whereby a good man is distinguished from all other men.

A good man is not differenced from other men by any thing without him, any church privileges which are common to hypocrites and sincere christians; any external visible performances, in which the disciples of the Pharisees may be more abundant and more specious than the disciples of Christ, *Matt.* ix. 14. much less by any corporeal or temporal enjoyment or ornament, strength, beauty, riches, descent, &c. nor by any carnal relation, though it were to Abraham, as the Jews bragged of their father Abraham, *John* viii. 33. but by something internal, substantial, by a relation to God; the character of a good man must be fetched from his correspondence to the chief good, and the happiness of a soul must be judged of by its relation to life, and love, and blessedness itself. Things external, corporeal, temporal, make some difference amongst men, but it is but nominal and titular in comparison: by these men are said to be rich or poor, noble or ignoble; but men are really and substantially differenced by the relation that they have to God; by this they are good or bad, godly or wicked. This is the most certain and proper note of a good man, viz. Communion with God: in all

Digitized by Google

other things he may be like other men, but in this he differs from and excels them all. This is a character proper *quarto modo*; for it agrees to every good man, to none but a good man, and always to him, as we shall see hereafter. The ground of my discourse then shall be this short and plain proposition, *viz.* "A godly man hath communion with God."

In order to the more distinct handling hereof, I must premise a few things briefly.

1. "That the gracious and loving God made nothing miserable of all that he made." There are no slaves born in this great house of the world. He made all things out of himself, and he hath no idea of evil in himself, so that it was not possible that he should make any thing evil or miserable. Every thing was good, *Gen.* i. 31. and so in some sense happy. He was free to make the world, but making it, he could not make it evil or miserable. Every thing is the product of almighty love and goodness.

2. "The happiness of all creatures consists in their acting agreeably to that nature that God gave them, and those ends which he propounded to them, and suitably to those laws which he gave them;" which laws were contrived with the greatest suitableness to those natures, and subserviency to those ends. Every creature is in its kind happy, whilst its acts agreeably to that nature which the wise Creator implanted in it; as the sun runs its race without ceasing, and rejoices so to do, and is, in some sense, happy in so doing. Departing from that nature the creature becomes miserable, as the earth bringing forth briers and thorns, instead of those good fruits which it was appointed to bring forth, is said to be cursed, *Gen.* iii. 17, 18.

3. "The happiness of the creature is higher or lower, greater or lesser, according as it comes nearer to God, or is farther off from him," according as it receives more or less from him, according to what communion it hath with him. The life and happiness of the sun is much lower than that of a man, because it cannot enjoy such high and

Digitized by Google

excellent communications from, or communion with God as man doth.

4. "There can be no communion without likeness." The sun shines upon a stone wall, as well as upon man, but a stone wall has no communion with the sun, because it hath no eyes to see the light of it as man hath, nor can receive the benign influences of its heat as the herbs do. A log of wood lieth in the water as well as the fish, but it hath no communion with the water, nor receives any advantage by it as the fish doth. God is present, according to his infinite essence with the devils as well as with the angels, but they have no likeness in nature to him, and so no communion with him, as these have.

5. "God hath given a more large and excellent capacity to man, than to any other of his creatures upon earth." God hath endued man with reason, and so made him capable of a higher life, and a more excellent communion with his Maker than all the rest. The rational soul of all sublunary creatures, is only capable to know, love, serve, enjoy, imitate God, and so to have a glorious communion with him. The sun, in all its glory and brightness, is not so excellent a being as any soul of man upon this account. And although man, by his fall, lost his actual communion with God, yet he is a reasonable creature still; he hath not lost his capacity of receiving influences from him, and enjoying communion with him. The world, when it is at the darkest, is yet capable of being enlightened.

6. "When the nature of man is, by divine grace, healed of its distemperature, and restored to its former rectitude, to act suitably to the end for which it was made, and to spend itself upon its proper object, then man comes to have a right communion with God, and to be happy." —All rational souls are capable of holding communion with God, but all do not hold communion with him; but they that express the purity and holiness of the divine life, that know God, and live like him, these are his children, *Matt.* v. 45, and those only do rightly and really

Digitized by Google

converse with him: when the Spirit of God informs these rational souls, and derives the strength of a divine life through them, and stamps the lively impressions of divine perfections upon them, rendering our hearts, wills and ways, conformable to that glorious pattern, that infinite good, then do we enjoy a proper communion with him, and are truly blessed; though we are not completely blessed, till this conformity be perfected according to what those souls are, or may be capable of.

This is the true, and proper notion of man's communion with God, and relation to him, which we cannot fully describe, till we more fully enjoy. That soul that truly lives and feeds upon God, does taste more than it can tell; and yet it can tell this, that this is the most high, noble, excellent, glorious life in the world.

This communion, as also the intimateness and closeness of it, are described variously in the holy scriptures, by the similitude of members being in the body, 1 *Cor.* xii. 27. of branches being in the vine, *John* xv. 1, 2. by being *formed according to God's image*, Rom. viii. 29. *changed into his image*, 2 Cor. iii. 18. by *God's dwelling in the soul, and the soul in him*, 1 John iv. 16. by Christ's being formed in the soul, *Gal.* iv. 19. by the soul's having Christ, 1 *John* v. 12. by Christ supping with the soul, and the soul with him, *Rev.* iii. 20. Because nothing is more our own, nor more one with us, than that which we eat and drink, being incorporated into us; therefore is this spiritual communion between God and the godly soul oftentimes in scripture described by our eating and drinking with him. Thus God was pleased to allow his people under the law, when they had offered up a part of their beasts in sacrifice to him, to sit down and feast upon the rest, as a token of that familiarity and oneness that was between him and them. By the like action our Saviour shadowed out the same mystery, when, in the sacrament of his supper, he appointed them to sit down to eat and drink with him, to intimate their feeding upon him, and most close communion with

Digitized by Google

him: yea, the state of glory, which is the most perfect communion with God, is thus shadowed out too, *Matt.* viii. 11. *Rev.* xix. 9. And which is worth noting, I think the sacramental eating and drinking hath some reference to that most intimate communion of the saints with God in glory: our Saviour himself seems to imply as much, in that speech of his, *Luke* xxii. 30. *That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom:* in which words he seems plainly to allude to the sacramental eating and drinking which he had a little before instituted, *viz.* ver. 19. Which makes some to believe that that gesture is to be retained in that ordinance, which is most proper and usual to express familiarity and communion; and to take away that gesture, is to destroy one great end of our Saviour in appointing this supper, which was to represent that familiar communion which is between himself and every believing soul. I will not here examine the validity of their argument, which possibly, if pressed home, might introduce a rudeness into the worship of God, under pretence of familiarity: but it seems very plain, that the nature of that ordinance doth shadow out the intimate communion between God and a godly soul.

I have already, in part, prevented myself, and shewed you wherein the soul's communion with God consists: but yet, to give you a more distinct knowledge of this great mystery, I shall unfold it in these three following particulars.

1st, "A godly soul hath communion with God in his attributes." When the soul of man is moulded and formed into a resemblance of the divine nature, then hath it a true fellowship with him. Now, this communion with God in his attributes is to be seen two ways.

1. "When the soul is in its measure, according to the capacity of a creature, all that which God is." This is the communion which the angels have with God; their beholding of the face of God is not to be understood of a mere speculation, or an idle gazing upon a Deity, but they see

Digitized by Google

him by receiving his image upon themselves, and reflecting his glory and brightness; they partake of the goodness, purity, holiness, wisdom, righteousness of God, which makes them such glorious spirits; and the want of this makes the other, whom we call devils, to be what they are. Thus godly men shall have communion with God, they shall see God, *Matt.* v. 8. *Heb.* xii. 14. Yea, thus they have communion with him in some measure: they do not only see God in the world: as the devils do, nor see him in the word, as many hypocritical and wicked men do, but they see him in themselves, in the frame of their own souls, they find themselves molded in his image, and a resemblance of him drawn upon them. This is a beautiful vision of God, true and real, though not full and complete. This is set out in scripture by being *holy as God is holy*, 1 Pet. i. 16. *perfect as God is perfect*, Matt. v. 48. This our Saviour exhorts us to seek after, *Matt.* xi. 29. *Take my yoke upon you, learn of me; for I am meek and lowly:* and the apostle *Eph.* v. 1. *Be ye followers of God, as dear children.* When the nature and perfections of God, his holiness, goodness, righteousness, wisdom, *&c.* are copied out upon our natures, and the same spirit is in us which was in Christ Jesus, then have we a true communion with God; which blessed communion, when the soul becomes all that which God is, is by a conformity of nature.

2. "When the soul, in its actions as a creature, doth rightly answer to the attributes of the Creator." As when the soul doth answer the goodness of God with suitable affections of love, and joy, and delight; when the soul doth correspond to the sovereignty and wisdom of God by the acts of self-denial and resignation; and doth converse with the righteousness of God by patience, and a holy acquiescency. When the soul doth rightly exert those acts which are proper and suitable to the nature of God, then it may be said to hold communion with him in his attributes. Now this suitableness of the soul, I mean especially with reference to the incommunicable attributes of God, where

Digitized by Google

there is no place for imitation, though it hold good in the rest also.

2dly, "A godly soul hath communion with God in his word." To read, profess, or hear the word, is not to hold a real communion with God therein: many do so that are strangers to God: a man may read my letters, and yet correspond with my enemy. That son in the gospel, that heard his father's command, and answered, *I go, Sir*, but went not, had no right communion with his paternal authority. But when the soul is ennobled into such a frame as this word doth require, then it holds communion with God in his word; *e. g.* when the soul puts forth those acts of humiliation, holy fear, and reverence, godly trembling, which do suit the nature of a divine threatning, when the soul answers the command of God with suitable resolutions, repentings, reformations, and real obedience, when it entertains the promise with suitable acts of holy delight, joy, refreshment, recumbency, and acquiesces in the same, then doth it truly converse with God in his word.

3dly, "A godly soul hath communion with God in his works." And that is, when the soul doth answer the several providences of God with suitable and pertinent affections and dispositions. The godly soul doth not only eye and observe the hand of God in all things that fall out, but doth comply with those providences, and is moulded into that frame, and put upon those duties which such providences call for. Then doth the soul rightly hold communion with God in his works, when it is humbled under humbling providences, is refreshed, strengthened, and grows up under prosperous providences, as they did *Acts* ix. 31. who having rest given them, were edified, comforted, multiplied, *&c.* When the soul doth rightly comport with every providence, and the will is moulded into the will of God, then do we hold communion with him in his works. This theme is large, because the works of God are manifold, of creation, redemption, preservation, works towards other men, and towards ourselves, both towards

Digitized by Google

our outward and inward man: a godly soul hath communion with God in all these; in the sense that I named even now, though perhaps not equally in all, yet sincerely and truly.

By what hath been said, you understand that right fellowship with God is not a bare communion of names; to have the name of God called upon us, and to be called christians, or the people of God, or to name the name of God, to profess it, to cry Lord, Lord, doth not make any one really and truly the better man, doth not make a soul rightly happy: it is not enough to cry, *The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord,* with them in *Jer.* i. 4. to make our boast in the law with them, *Rom.* ii. 23. to call ourselves the children of Abraham, as the Jews did in John the Baptist's time, *Matt.* iii. 9. These privileges and professions are extrinsical to the soul, and do nothing to the true ennobling of it. But right fellowship with God is a communion of hearts and natures, of will and affections, of interest and ends: to have one heart and will, the same interest and ends with God, is to be truly godly; a God-like man is the only godly man, a Christ-like nature brought into the soul doth only denominate a man a true christian. It is not speaking together, but loving and living together, that brings God and the soul into one; *I live, yet not I, but Christ that liveth in me,* Gal. ii. 20. And thus, I suppose, you have a fair account why the apostle James, chap. ii. does so much prefer works before faith, (for indeed faith is nothing worth, save only that faith which joins the soul to the object, and makes the thing believed one's own;) as also why the apostle Paul prefers love before a faith of miracles, 1 *Cor.* xiii. 2. Though indeed a justifying faith is the most miraculous, that faith that unites the soul and God together is more excellent, and indeed more miraculous than the faith that removes mountains. When I consider the proper happiness, and perfection of a soul, and the nature of this blissful communion with God, I cannot but wonder how it is possible

Digitized by Google

that men should take their communion with God to consist in a slight acquaintance, with him, profession of him, and performances to him. I am confident it is not possible that men should have any true feeling of happiness in such acquaintance, any more than a man can be really filled with the seeing or carving of meat which he eats not.

Before I apply the doctrine, give me leave to lay down some rules or positions tending further to explain and clear it.

1. This must be held, which I touched upon before, that, "there can be no communion between God and man, but by a likeness of nature, a new, a divine principle implanted in the soul." A beast hath no communion with a man, because reason, the ground of such communion, is wanting. Of all the creatures, there was none found that could be a meet help for Adam, that could be taken into the human society, till Eve was made, who was a human person. So neither can there be any conjunction of the soul with God, but by oneness of spirit, 1 *Cor.* vi. 17. *He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.*

2. "There can be no communion with God but by a Mediator," no Mediator but Christ Jesus, who is God-man. Two cannot walk together, nor hold communion, except they be agreed: and there can be no agreement made between God and man but by Christ Jesus. Therefore it is said here, *Our communion is with the Father and the Son*, q. d. with the Father by the Son: and faith, whereby the soul and God are united, is still said to be *faith in Christ*, as we find up and down the scriptures.

3. "There can be no perfect communion with God in this life." Our communion with heaven, whilst we are upon earth, is imperfect; our resemblance to God is scant and dark in comparison of what it shall be. We know but in part, love but in part, enjoy but in part; we are but in part holy and happy. There can be no perfect communion with God, till there be a perfect reconciliation of natures as well as persons; and that cannot be whilst there is any

Digitized by Google

thing unlike to God in the soul, whilst any impure thing dwells in the soul which cannot truly close with God, nor God with that. The Holy Spirit can never suffer any defiled thing to unite itself with it; it is not lawful for "any impure thing to mix itself with pure divinity," so Socrates the heathen. *What communion hath righteousness with unrighteousness?* saith the apostle, 2 *Cor.* vi. 14. and so far as a righteous man is in any part unrighteous, so far he is a stranger to God: the unregenerate part of a regenerate man hath no more communion with God than a wicked man, than the devil himself hath, no more than darkness hath with light.

4. "Our communion with God must be distinguished from the sense and feeling of it." Many have run upon sad miscarriages, (and those indeed extremes) whilst they place communion with God in the sense and feeling of it, in raptures of joy, extasies, and transports of soul: which indeed, if they be real, are not so much it, as the flower of it, something resulting and separable from it. Communion with God cannot be lost in a saint, for then he is no saint; for it is the *proprium quarto modo* of a saint to have communion with God: and a saint under desertion hath communion with God even then as really, though not so feelingly, as at any other time, so far as he is sanctified. But the sense of this communion may be very much, if not altogether lost, and oftentimes is lost.

5. "A soul's communion with God cannot "be interrupted by any local mutations." It is a spiritual conjunction, and is not violated by any confinement; the walls of a prison cannot separate God and the godly soul; banishment cannot drive a soul from God,—*Cœlum non animum mutant, &c.* The blessed angels, those ministring spirits, when they are dispatched into the utmost ends of the world upon the service of God, are even then beholding the face of God, and enjoy as intimate communion with him as ever: the case is the same with all godly souls, whose communion with God does not depend upon any local

Digitized by Google

situation; it is not thousands of miles that can beget a distance between God and the soul. Indeed nothing but sin does it, or can do it:—*Your iniquities have separated between you and your God*, Isa. lix. 2. nothing but sin is contrary to this divine fellowship, and so nothing but that can interrupt this spiritual society. To speak properly, sin does not so much cause the soul's distance from God, as itself is that distance. Man and wife remain one, though at a hundred miles distance; and believing souls maintain a certain spiritual communion one with another, though in several parts of the world. The society and communion of godly souls one with another, so far as it is spiritual, cannot be interrupted by bodily distance, much less than the fellowship of God with the godly man, who carries about with him, and in him, a divine nature, the image of God, a holy God-like disposition withersoever he goes.

6. "This communion with God which I have been speaking of, is much better than all outward acts and enjoyments, duties and ordinances whatsoever, though they be never so many or specious." God himself long since decided this matter, that a broken and contrite heart is better than all sacrifices, *Ps.* li. 17. that to obey was better than sacrifice, 1 *Sam.* xv. 22. that mercy was better than sacrifice, *Hosea* vi. 6. that to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God, was to be preferred before thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil, *Mic.* vi. 7, 8. It holds, in reference to gospel duties, though they may seem more spiritual than the oblations of the law. A real soul-communion with God, a communion of hearts and natures, of wills and affections, of interests and ends, is infinitely more excellent than all hearing, praying, celebration of sabbaths or sacraments, *James* i. 25. as the end is more excellent than the means: for so stands the case between them.

Yea I will add, (though some proud and wanton spirits have made strange work with it, yet) it is a sure and most excellent doctrine, that this spiritual communion is a con-

Digitized by Google

tinual sabbath, (a sabbath of communion is much better than a sabbath of rest:) this is the sabbath that the angels and saints in heaven keep, though they know no such thing as a first day in the week, have no reading, preaching, or praying, amongst them. This is a continual praying, and effectual way of praying in silence. A right active imbibing faith does virtually contain a prayer in it; right believing is powerful praying. The knees, eyes, and tongues, bear the least share in prayer, the whole of the work lies upon the soul, and particularly upon faith in the soul, which is indeed the life and soul of prayer. Faith can pray without words; but the most elegant words, the phrase of angels, is not worthy to be called prayer without faith. I speak not so much of faith inditing a prayer, or giving life to it, as of its being virtually prayer, if not something more; for indeed faith is a real bringing down of that God, and sucking in of those influences into the soul, which prayer only looks up for.

Communion with God is a continual fast; it is that spiritual and most excellent way of fasting, whereby the soul emptying itself of itself and all self-fulness, self-sufficiency, self-confidence, receives of God alone, and is filled therewith. A soul communing rightly with God, is a soul emptied of, and, as it were, fasting from itself; which is the most excellent way of fasting.

It is a continual thanksgiving; and indeed the best way of thanksgiving in the world. To render up ourselves to God purely and entirely, to reflect the glory of God in an holy and god-like temper, is a real and living thank-offering. This is that hallelujah so much spoke of, which the angels and saints in glory do sing perpetually: what other adjunct of it there may be, I will not here dispute.

This communion of hearts and wills is a constant and most excellent celebration of sacraments. The soul that is really baptized into the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, and feeds upon God, and is one with him, keeps a continual sacrament; without which the sacramental eating and drinking

Digitized by Google

is but a jejune and dry devotion. In a word, it is not possible for any thing that is extrinsical to the soul to make it happy; but the soul that is advanced into the noble state of communion with God, is made partaker of a new nature, and is truly happy.

Nay, further, I will add, that this communion with God is not only better than all duties and ordinances, but even better than all revelations, evidences, discoveries that can be made or given to the soul, *ab extra*, all that are from without. A manifestation of God, i. e. of a divine life in the soul, is much better than such a manifestation as Moses had of his glory in the cleft of the rock, *Exod.* xxxiii. 22. Many think, O if they might but be assured of the love of God, of the pardon of sin, of an interest in Christ, they should be happy! why, I will tell you, if you had a voice from heaven, saying that ye were the beloved children of God, as Christ had; an angel sent from God to tell you that ye were beloved, and highly favoured of God, as his mother Mary had, yet were communion with God to be preferred before these: for these things could not make a soul happy without real communion with God, but communion with God, can and doth make a soul happy without these: and to this purpose, I suppose, I may apply that famous speech of our Saviour's by way of allusion, *It is more blessed to give, than to receive*, to give up one's self, one's heart, will, interests, and affections, to God, than to receive any external discoveries and manifestations from him. Why do we so earnestly seek after signs from without us of God's presence with us, as if there were any thing better or more desirable to the soul than Emanuel, God with us, as the apostle speaks, *Christ in us the hope of glory?* He that desires any other evidence of grace, but more grace, does not only light up a candle to see the sun by, but indeed he acts like one that thinks there is something better than God himself; though I do not say that all do think so who are covetous of such manifestations. But this I will say, and you may do well to think upon it, that holy longings

Digitized by Google

after a true and spiritual communion with God do certainly spring from a divine principle in the soul; whereas a thirst after assurance of God's love, and reconciliation of our persons with him, may be only the fruit of self-love and interest. *Let me die the death of the righteous!* you know whose wish it was.

7. "Though communion with God concerns the whole soul, and all the faculties, affections, and motions of it," (it is God's spreading his influences, and exercising his sovereignty over all the powers of the soul, and their mutual spending of themselves upon him, and conforming to him) "yet the great acts of the soul, whereby it chiefly holds communion with God, are loving and believing." Love is the joining and knitting of the soul to God; faith is the soul's labouring after more intimate conjunction with him, a sucking in influences from him, and participations of him into the soul. We may say that faith fetches in supplies from heaven, and love enjoys them; faith sucks in sweetness and virtue from Christ, and love feeds upon it. Certainly these two eminent graces grow, live, and thrive together, and are inseparable companions. It is somewhat difficult to distinguish them, or to assign to each his proper place and work in the soul; they seem mutually to act, and to be mutually acted by each other: perhaps the apostle might have respect to this mystery, when he speaks so doubtfully, *Gal.* v. 6. We know indeed that in the state of perfect communion, which we call glory, love shall abide and flourish more abundantly, and there shall be no room, for faith there, not as to the principal act of it; but which of them hath the greater part in maintaining our communion with God in this world, is not easy, nor indeed needful to determine. The godly soul is the most proper temple wherein God dwelleth, according to that 2 *Cor.* vi. 16. *Ye are the temple of the living God;* faith and love are the *Jachin* and *Boaz*, the two great pillars which keep up the soul as a temple; take away these, and it remains a soul indeed, but the soul does not remain a temple to the Lord. In a word,

Digitized by Google

these two are the soul's principal handmaids which she useth about this blessed guest; faith goes out and brings him in, and love entertains him; by faith she finds him whom she seeks, and by love she kisses him whom she finds, as the spouse is described, *Cant.* viii. 1.

8. "The communion that is between God and the godly soul is altogether different from that communion that is between creatures." Here I might shew you how it exceeds and excels that, in many respects; but I shall not insist upon any of those particulars, nor indeed upon any of those many differences that are between them, save only upon this one: the communion that is between creature and creature is perfect in its kind, and so, consequently, gives mutual satisfaction; I mean, it terminates the expectations, so that nothing remains to be enjoyed in them more than what is enjoyed. The creature is shallow, and soon is fathomed, we soon come to the bottom of it: a finite can grasp a finite being, and enjoy it, as I may say, all at once. A man may come so near to his friend that he can come no nearer, enjoy him as fully as he is capable to enjoy, or the other to be enjoyed: created sweetness may be exhausted to the very bottom. But the soul's communion with God does not give it any such satisfaction, though indeed, in some sense, it gives a satisfaction of a much higher and more excellent kind. I told you before, that the soul's communion with God is imperfect in this life; and therefore it must needs follow, that it cannot satisfy; that is, not terminate and fill up the desires of it. Communion with God is maintained by faith and love, as you have heard, which proves it to be very sweet; but it also admits of hope, which proves it to be not satisfactory: for where there is yet any place left for hope, there is no full or satisfactory enjoyment. This may serve as a certain note whereby to judge of the truth of that communion with God; it is not glutting to the soul, but will certainly manifest itself in incessant hungrings, *inter opes inops*, the soul is in the midst of plenty, and yet cries out as if it were ready to starve for want. When I consider

Digitized by Google

the temper of some perfectionists, who cry down duties and ordinances, as low and unprofitable rudiments, and boast of their full and inaccessionable attainments, and compare it with the temper of the great apostle, who did not reckon that he had attained, but still followed after that he might apprehend; who forgot the things that were behind, and reached forth unto those things that were before, pressing towards the mark, *&c. Phil.* iii. 12, 13, 14. I am ready to cry out, *Aut hic non est apostolus, aut hic non sunt apostolici;* but an apostle he was, and had very intimate communion with his Lord: and therefore, I confess, I cannot allow these men so high a place in my opinion, as they have in their own. God is infinite, and therefore though the soul may be ever grasping, yet it can never comprehend; and yet the soul finds him to be infinitely good, and so cannot cease grasping at him neither. The godly soul sees that there is yet much more to be enjoyed of God, and in him; and therefore, though it be very near to him, yet cries out and complains of its distance from him, O when shall I come and appear before him! though it be united to him, yet it longs to be yet more one with him still, to be in a closer conjunction. The godly soul forgets, with Paul, what it hath received, not through disingenuity or unthankfulness, but through an holy ardor and covetousness: all that he hath of God seems little, because there is yet so much to be had. Though the godly soul drinks of the fountain, yet that is not enough, it would lie down by it; though it do lie down by it, yet so it is not satisfied neither, except it may bathe itself, and even be swallowed up therein. Behold a paradox! the godly soul is most thirsty, though, according to Christ's promise, it thirsts no more: it is most restless, though, according to his promise, it have rest. It is proper to God alone to rest in his love, for the creature cannot in this imperfect state: by this we know that we are not yet in heaven; for it is a state of perfect rest, not sloth, or cessation, but satisfaction. Faith is the fever of the soul, rendering it more thirsty by how much the more it drinks in of the

Digitized by Google

water of life, the living streams that flow forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb. As the waters of the sanctuary are described by the prophet, growing deeper and deeper, *Ezek.* xlvii. 3, 4, 5. so hope, which is the soul's appetite, grows larger and larger, and cannot be satisfied till the soul's capacity be filled up.

The doctrinal part being thus briefly dispatched, it will be easy to infer some things by way of corollary, I shall content myself with three only amongst many.

1*st*, " All wicked men are strangers to God." We know indeed that God, according to his infinite essence, is present with all his creatures: not only men, but even devils too, have their being in him; he hath spread his omnipotence, as the foundation whereupon the whole creation doth stand; he reared up the world in himself, and in him it doth subsist at this day. However angels and men had sadly fallen from God, yet they may be truly said to live in him still; and although all wicked souls straggle off from God, as to their dispositions and affections, ingrafting themselves into another stock by sin and wickedness, yet they cannot possibly straggle from him as to their subsistence, as the apostle teaches the Athenian Philosophers, *Acts* xvii. 27. *He is not far from every one of us*, though few feel after him or find him. And it may be truly said, in some sense, that all the creatures, yea, the very worst of them, have a communion with God; all partake of him; no creature hath any thing of its own really distinct from him. Every thing that hath a being hath a relation to that infinite and supreme Being; and every living thing may be rightly said to have communion with him who is life itself. And all those several excellencies that are in the creatures are effluxes from God, who hath derived various prints of his own beauty and perfection upon every thing that he hath made. God's making of a thing is no other than the communicating of himself thereunto. And therefore when you look into the world, do not view any creature in the narrow point of its own being, but in the unbounded essence of God, and there-

Digitized by Google

in love and admire it. But upon the immortal soul of man, God hath copied out his divine perfections more clearly and gloriously than upon any other creature in this world. God could not make a rational soul, without communicating his own infinite wisdom, power, life, and freedom unto it: so that there is more of the divine nature to be seen in the understanding and will of any one man, than in the whole fabric of heaven and earth.

Notwithstanding this, wicked men are strangers to God. They live and move in God indeed, but they know it not, they consider it not, they act as if they had no dependence upon him, no relation to him. Though have some kind of communion with God, as creatures, yet this makes them not at all happy: for they are departed from God in their affections and dispositions, they have degenerated from that subserviency and subordination to the divine will, which is the proper perfection of the creature, and are *alienated from the life of God*, as the aposle speaks, *Eph.* iv. 10. It is not the soul's moving in God, that makes it truly and happily nigh unto him, but its moving towards God as the chief object, and according to the will of God as the chiefest rule; and therefore wicked men, who pitch upon other objects, and walk by other laws, even the lusts and ordinances of their own flesh and fancy, are properly strangers to God, and miserable. He is not properly said to know God, who hath a notion of him formed in his head, but he whose heart and will is moulded into a conformity to God, and a delight in him; so that a wicked man, though he know and believe, and tremble, as much as any of the devils, yet not loving nor delighting in God as his chiefest good, not being conformed to his image as the highest and purest perfection, may be truly said to be estranged from him; which is a state of hell, and death, and darkness. This is the man who, though not in words, yet interpretatively and really, saith unto God, *Depart from me, I desire not the knowledge of thy ways*, with them in *Job* xxi. 14. Sinners really exempt themselves from the dominion of Christ, and do

Digitized by Google

really, though not audibly, say with them in the gospel, *Luke* xix. 14. *We will not have this man to reign over us.* However men pretend to, and boast of their relation to and acquaintance with God, certainly all that live a mere sensual life, non-conformists to the image of God, are truly said to be strangers to him, and in a state of non-communion with him, 1 *John* i. 6. 2 *Cor.* vi. 14.

2. "The life of a true christian is the most high and noble life in the world;" it exceeds the life of all other men even of the greatest men. The character that is here given of the godly man is the highest that can be given of man, or indeed of any creature. It is the highest glory and excellency of the creature to partake of the life of God, of the perfections of the Creator; and such is the description that the Spirit of God here makes of the godly man. What an unreasonable and senseless reproach is that which this wicked world doth cast upon religion, calling it a low and despicable thing, and upon religious and godly men, calling them low-spirited, puny people? Can a man be better spirited than with the Spirit of God? Can any thing more truly ennoble a soul than a divine nature? Can a man be raised any higher than to heaven itself? So noble is the godly soul, *Prov.* xv. 24. *The way of life is above to the wise;* and consequently all wicked men lead a low life, and are bound under chains of death and darkness: the righteous man is of a high and divine original, born of God, born from above; and therefore is more excellent than his neighbour, than any of his neighbours, even a king himself being judge, *Prov.* xii. 26. What a hellish baseness is that sinful gallantry of spirit, what a brutishness is that sensuality of living, which the degenerate sons of Adam do so much magnify! True goodness and excellency of spirit must be measured by the proportion that it bears to the supreme good, the infinite pattern of all perfection. What excellent persons were those renowned saints of old, of whom the apostle says, that *the world was not worthy,* Heb. xi. 38. however they were thought *not worthy to live in the world.*

Digitized by Google

What a noble and generous spirit of true christian valour, patience, meekness, contempt of the world, and self-denial, was that which was to be seen in the blessed apostles, however they were esteemed as the filth and sweepings of the world, the *off-scouring of all things?* To which of the noble, wise, mighty men of the world, as such, did God ever say, "These are the men that have fellowship with me, these are the men that lead a noble and divine life?" No, no, *not many noble are called;* and when they are called, they are made more noble than ever they were by birth or descent, by places of preferment or command. The life of every wicked man, of what rank or size soever he be in the world, is but a low life, a life in most things common to the very beasts with him: if the main of his business and delight be to eat, and drink, and work, and sleep, and enjoy sensual pleasures, what doth he? what enjoyeth he more than *the beasts that perish?* But the life of the meanest soul, that hath true and spiritual communion with God, is a life common to him with the blessed angels, those *sons of the morning*, the flower of the whole creation. That life which hath self for its centre, must needs be a penurious and indeed a painful life: for how can the soul of man possibly feed to the full upon such spare diet, such scant fare as it finds at home? Nay, indeed how can it choose but be in pain and torture whilst it stretcheth itself upon a self-sufficiency, or creature-fulness, which is not at all commensurate to it? But the soul that rightly stretches and spends all its faculties upon the infinite and blessed God, finds all its capacities filled up to the brim with that fountain of goodness, and itself perfectly matched with a suitable and satisfactory object. This is the true and only nobleness of spirit, when all powers and faculties of this immortal soul are exalted and advanced into a true and vital sympathy and communion with the chiefest good, formed according to his will, conformed to his image.

And O that wisdom might be more *justified of her children!* O that the life of God did but clearly manifest

Digitized by Google

itself, and shine forth in the lives of them that call themselves godly! Alas, that ever God himself should suffer reproach by reason of the low-spiritedness and laziness of his servants! For this cause is religion evil spoken of; the Lord awake and enable us to express and shew forth the divine life with all power and vigour, to live as high as the calling wherewith we are called, and so roll away this reproach!

3*dly*, "The life of a christian is not a heavy, sluggish thing, but active and vigorous," as the phrase, communion with God, imports. Religion is a communication of life and vigour from him who is life itself; which makes the truly god-like soul to be quick and powerful in its motions. Every thing is by so much the swifter and stronger in its motions, by how much the nearer it is to its centre, as philosophy tells us. Certainly by how much the nearer any man is gotten to God, who is the centre of souls, by so much the more does he covet after more intimate communion with him, and the more eagerly lay hold upon him. Communion does necessarily imply reaction or reflection: the soul that receives of a God, and his fulness, will certainly be returning itself into him again. Communion, in the very force of the phrase, implies a mutualness; we cannot suppose a soul partaking of God, but it must needs mutually render up itself to him again. There can be no commerce nor correspondence without returns: but what return can the godly soul make unto God? why, it renders up its whole self unto him. Faith is a giving grace as well as a receiving, it gives up the soul back to Christ, as well as takes Christ into the soul; it sucks in strength and grace from God, and reciprocally spends the same, and the whole powers of the soul upon him. The happiness of a godly soul doth not consist in cessation and rest; the soul itself being a powerful and active being; the happiness of it, the very rest of it, must also be active and vigorous. Where there is communion there must needs be quick and lively returns, reciprocations, reflections, and correspondencies;

Digitized by Google

the drawings of God are answered with the soul's running, *Cant.* i. 14. The motion of Christ's fingers begets a motion in the christian's soul, *Cant.* v. 4. *My Beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him.* These are the divine and harmonious responses which are made and maintained in the godly soul; the temple of the living God. O shake off that lazy and drowsy spirit, which hath so benumbed many in this cold and stupid age of the world; work out your salvation with care and diligence! If your religion be nothing but a spiritual kind of sleep, your heaven will prove to be nothing but a pleasant kind of dream.

Communion with God speaks something divine, active, vigorous. The life of a christian doth not consist only in cessation from evil, reformation of sin, or dying thereunto; mortification is but one part of regeneration. It is the conceit, and, I doubt, the deceit of many nominal christians, that if they can but keep up an indifferent even spirit and conversation, free from gross and scandalous sins from day to day, they are happy enough; their utmost ambition is to be innocent and harmless. This indeed is necessary and praise-worthy; but surely the happiness of a soul lies higher: thus happy are all the creatures that keep in the station, and keep up the order prescribed them of God: thus happy is the sun in the firmament, running his race continually, and never departing from the office which is assigned to it. But the soul of man is capable of a higher kind of happiness, *viz.* Communion with God; which is, when the faculties thereof being awakened, refined, and acted by the Spirit of God, do reciprocally act, and spend themselves upon him, longing to be perfectly swallowed up in him, and to be all that which God himself is, as far as the creature is capable to drink in the perfections of the Creator, and become one with his Maker. This is that truly noble and divine life, which is here called communion with God, which the high-spirited and generous soul labours yet more and more to be growing up into, and perfected in. Keep yourselves, with

Digitized by Google

David, from your iniquities; it is something to be freed from the guilt and power of sin; but there is somewhat higher than this, a more excellent attainment, a more divine accomplishment; go on therefore with the same David, and aspire after this pure and blissful state, this heaven upon earth, waiting for the more ample and glorious manifestations of God to you and in you, more than they that watch for the morning, as he did, *Ps.* cxxx. 6. This inference was only of instruction, but the sweetness and needfulness of the subject almost prevails with me to turn it into an earnest exhortation, but that I would not prevent myself. —Therefore I proceed to the next way of improving this doctrine, which shall be by way of conviction or reprehension.

1. If our fellowship *is*, it reproves them that can take up with a *shall be*, a heaven to come. I am now speaking, not to the worst of men, whose very souls are swallowed up in sensual enjoyments, and imprisoned in their senses: for these men either think of no heaven at all, or else they place their heaven and happiness in the enjoyment of themselves or of the creature. Nor yet do I speak to those men who, being persuaded of a future state, do indeed wish for a heaven to come, but then it is a poor kind of low and earthly heaven, consisting in ease, rest, safety, freedom from troubles or torments, which is the best happiness which most men understand, the highest heaven that any carnal mind can see or soar up to. But I am speaking to a better and finer sort of souls than these, that are verily possessed with a sense of a pure and spiritual heaven in the world to come; yea, they are so overpowered with the foresight of it, as that they earnestly expect and wish for it; yet, the hopes of it sustain and strengthen their hearts under the manifest temptations and persecutions of this present world; they are so verily persuaded of the truth of it, and of their own title to it too, that they are content to abide this long and disconsolate night of dimness, and anguish, and frightfulness, merely in expectation of the dawning of

Digitized by Google

that day, that clear and bright day of their glorious and everlasting redemption. And herein I am far from blaming them, nay, I must needs condemn their magnanimous faith self-denial. But, in the mean time, they dwell too much upon heaven as a future state, and comfort themselves only in a happiness to come, not longing and labouring to find a heaven opened within themselves, a beginning of eternal bliss brought into themselves: they are too well content with a certain reversion, and do not eagerly enough endeavour a present possession, to be actually instated in so much of the inheritance of souls as may fall to their share even in this lower world; this slothful temper and inactivity I do condemn wherever it is found; yea, though it be in my own soul. Every thing in the world, by a natural principle, thirsts after its proper rest, and a happiness suitable to the nature of it; no creature can be content, though it may be constrained, to be at a distance from its centre, but is still carried out towards its own perfection. And why then should a godly soul, who is God's only new creature in the world, be content with a state of imperfection? why should not the saint as eagerly covet, and as earnestly pursue the most intimate and close communion and conjunction with his God, as they do with their respective centres? Can any earthly sensual man be content with an inheritance in reversion, so as to suspend his minding and following of the world till hereafter? Can any ambitious spirit, who places his main happiness and contentment in popular estimation, and worldly greatness, be content to stand gazing at preferments; will he be willing to sit still, and wait till they drop into his mouth? No, no, there is a raging thirst in the soul, which will not suffer it to be at rest, but is still awakening and provoking all the powers of the whole man, till they arise and fetch in water to quench it. And therefore we read of men making haste to be rich, *Prov.* xxviii. 22. and hastening after another god, *Ps.* xvi. 4. which eager and ardent passions towards earthly objects, you may see lively described in the instances of Ahab,

Digitized by Google

Ammon, and Haman, in the holy story. And is there any reason to be given, why that new nature and divine principle, which God putteth into regenerate souls, should not carry them as hastily and forcibly to a present fruition of their proper object and happiness, (so far as at present it may be enjoyed) as that corrupt and degenerate nature doth hurry them on in whom it ruleth, towards the satisfaction of their beastly lusts? Divines speak sometimes of making heaven and eternal life present to ourselves, and say that this is the work of faith; which is an high and excellent doctrine, but, I doubt, not thoroughly understood by ordinary christians. To make heaven present to one's self, is not only to insist upon a state of future happiness in frequent meditations, to think much of it, neither is this that noble employment of saving faith: but the life and power of faith is most eminently exerted in sucking in participations of life and grace from Christ, and in a real bringing down of God and heaven into the soul. The truth is, heaven is a state of perfect communion with God, a state of love, joy, peace, purity, freedom; and as far as any soul is in such a state upon earth, so far it is above the earth, and may be said to be in heaven. Therefore a right active soul, that truly understands its proper and spiritual heaven and happiness, so far as it is thus active and sensible, cannot be content to stay for all its happiness till the world to come; cannot be content to be unhappy, no not for an hour, but is still growing up in God, and springing up into everlasting life, *John* iv. 14.

2. It reprehends them that make a stir about the kingdom of Christ in the world, and men's being brought into the communion of the church, but advance not his kingdom in their own souls, nor long to have their own souls advanced into that noble state of communion with *the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.* There is, doubtless, a generation of such popular christians, who being strangers to the life, and power, and spirit of true religion, endeavour to put off themselves to the world, and commend themselve

Digitized by Google

to the charity of their brethren, by a pretended zeal for the kingdom of Christ in the world, and the glorious manifestation of it, as they speak. I know indeed that it is worthy the cares, and prayers, and utmost diligence of every serious christian, to spread and propagate the knowledge of the gospel, to pour out the ointment of Christ's name far and near: a more pure and spiritual administration of all gospel ordinances throughout the world is highly desirable; yea, and I think an indifferent and careless disposition towards the worship of God argues much of an earthly and atheistical mind. But I fear that kingdom of Christ, and those glorious manifestations and discoveries which are so much pretended to by many, if they should be thoroughly examined, would be, at length, resolved into nothing else but the advancement of some one party or interest above all the rest, or the exchanging of an old form and dress of religion for a new one; and that this zeal would be found little better than the blazings of self-love, a fire kindled not by a coal from the altar, but by a spark of their own. But, be it so, that this disposition of theirs is sincere and spiritual; should not this charity begin at home? The most proper kingdom of Christ is that whereby he ruleth in the hearts of men; the most excellent worship is when the soul itself becomes a temple for the living God to dwell in, and to receive and reflect the manifestations of his glory, when a fire of divine love is kindled in it, and therein it doth offer up, not bulls and goats, no, nor so much prayers and meditations, as indeed itself unto God, which is a reasonable service, as the apostle speak, far more glorious than the Mosaical or Evangelical dispensation either, if you consider it in the letter only. Whatever men may pretend, no man can be truly and rightly studious of the advancement of the kingdom of God in the world, that hath not first felt the mighty power, and blessed effects of it in his own soul. Communion with the church is only so far to be valued, as it lies in order to a real and spiritual communion with God; which communion with God, if we do indeed sincerely wish

Digitized by Google

to others, we shall more abundantly labour to promote in ourselves. I cannot believe that he doth heartily seek the happiness of others, who himself sits still, and is content to be miserable, especially when their happiness and his is one and the same.

3. It condemns them for no christians, whose fellowship is only with their fellow creatures. We have seen that this is the character, the distinguishing character of a godly man, to have fellowship with God; it must needs follow then, that those degenerate souls that rise no higher than the world, that converse only with self or any other creature, are verily strangers to true christianity, whatever their confidence or presumption may be. Christians, tell me not what you profess of Christ, what you believe of the gospel, what orthodox opinions you hold, what an honest party you side with, how many and specious duties you perform, no, nor what hopes or wishes you have of going to heaven; but tell me where is your principal communion; what do you mainly mind, follow, converse with; what pattern you conform to; which rule do you live by; of worldly men doth hasten after another god, as the what object do you ultimately aim at? The whole world Psalmist's phrase is, though not all after the same God; they spend their souls indeed upon various objects, and use different methods to obtain rest, but yet all their happiness and contentment are ultimately resolved into creature communion. That dreadful sentence, that the apostle delivers universally concerning all men, is to be limited to all wicked men only, and of them it is undoubtedly true, *Phil.* ii. 21. *All seek their own, and none the things of Jesus Christ:* and of all these it is that of the Psalmist's *many* is to be understood, *Ps.* iv. 6. *There be many that say, Who will shew us any good?* i. e. any creature-good, as the words following do explain it. All unregenerate souls are bound up in the creature, some creature or other; and therefore the noblest of them, whatever brags they may make, is low and ignoble; their main

Digitized by Google

converse is but with their fellow creatures, and indeed creatures much inferior to themselves, *corn and wine*, says the Psalmist, *earthly things*, says the apostle, *Phil.* iii. 19. *Who mind earthly things.* In a word, though it be true what the apostle says in one place, that all men in the world do live in God, *Acts* xvii. 28. yet it is also true, that most men, as the same apostle speaks elsewhere, do live *without God in the world*, have their hearts staked down to one creature or other, and so fall short of this honourable character which the apostle here gives of godly men. *Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

And now I shall wrap up the remainder of this discourse, in an humble request and earnest expostulation.

"Reckon not upon any happiness below this communion." There are many things which a christian may take to be comforts; but only one, this one, that he ought to take to be the happiness of his life. I design not to speak any thing to the prejudice of natural or civil ornaments or accomplishments, much less to the disparagement of any of those endowments or employments which are, in a sense, spiritual, commonly called gifts and duties: but I confess, it is one of the great wonders of the world to me, to see such a noble and intelligent being as the soul of man is, attending to, and pursuing after things either extrinsical or inferior to itself, in the mean time carelessly forgetting, or wilfully rejecting its main happiness, principal end, and proper perfection. As for those sensual persons, those mere animals, whose souls are incarnate in their senses, and seem to perform no higher office in the world than the souls of beasts, that is, to carry about their bodies, who value themselves by their bodies, or which is baser, by the apparel that clothes them, or the estates that feed them, I shall not now trouble myself about them, but leave them to be chastised by Seneca or Plutarch, or indeed any ordinary philosopher.

I shall rather apply myself a little to a sort of higher-spirited people, whom by a condescension of charity, we

Digitized by Google

eall christians, who, valuing themselves by external professions, privileges, performances, may indeed be said to be somewhat more scrupulous and curious, but no less mistaken than the former: for if the grosser sort of sensualists deny and professedly abjure their own reasons, and the finer sort of hypocrites more cunningly bribe theirs, each method amounts to no more than a cheat, and both parties, will be alike miserable, save that the latter will be somewhat more tormented in missing of a happiness which he looked and hoped for. It is not proper to my present discourse, to speak so highly and honourably of these externals of christianity, nor to press them so zealously, as I do at all times when I have occasion; for I do verily value all ordinances of Christ, and duties of God's worship at a high rate; nay, I know not any serious and truly godly soul in the world, but it is of this same profession with me: but I must confess, I think it is one of the greatest and most pernicious cheats in the world, for men to feed upon the dish instead of the meat, to place their happiness in those things which God hath only appointed to be means to convey it. This was the great destruction of the Jewish church; by this they perished: thus they are every where described in scripture, as a people resting in their privileges and performances, boasting of their sacrifices and temple-service; they made account of a strange kind of flesh-pleasing heaven, something distinct from them, and reserved for them, to be given them by way of reward for the righteousness which themselves had wrought by the power of their own free-will (which free-will, they say is an effect of man's fall, but they make it a cause of man's rise; for now he can purchase and merit a happiness, which happiness is also more illustrious than that given of mere grace;) which righteousness, if we look either into their own writings, or God's writings concerning them, we shall find was nothing else but a strict observance of the precepts of the law, according to the letter and external dispensation of it. Such a low and legal spirit was generally found among the Jews; I wish the

Digitized by Google

greatest part of us, who are in profession and name evangelical, be not found as truly legal in spirit and temper as they were. If we cry, The gospel of Christ, the gospel of Christ; with the same spirit as they cried, *The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord;* our confidence will as surely betray us into a final misery as theirs did. True, indeed, prayers, sacraments, sermons, are somewhat finer words than the old obsolete ones, the law, sacrifices, ceremonies; but, alas! they are but words; at least they are not gods, no more fit to terminate our devotions and affections than these. I beseech you therefore, christians, be not mistaken in this matter. True christianity is not a notion but a nature; that is not religion which is lapped up in books, or laid up in men's brains, but it is laid in the very constitution of the soul, a new principle implanted by God in the highest powers of the soul, refining and spiritualizing all the faculties thereof, and rendering them as like to God himself, as such a creature can resemble its Creator.

It is a truth as clear as the sun is clear, that nothing can make a soul truly happy but what is wrought into the nature of it, and that must be somewhat more excellent than itself, and that can be nothing less than something divine, even the image of the blessed God. If you be christians in died and in truth, value all the ordinances of God, and the duties of the christian religion, but value not yourselves by these, your happiness by these: attend upon them all for the maintaining and increasing of real fellowship with God: for though these be not it, yet they are the way wherein it pleases God to give it: drink the sincere milk of the word, but let it be only with a holy design of growing thereby, of growing up into God, and a divine life. Away with those low and base thoughts of happiness; the happiness of a soul is a high and excellent, indeed a divine thing; it is in some sense common to God and the soul; God is happy in himself alone, and the soul can only be happy in him. What contentment, what real happiness, christian, can the rising of thy party in the

Digitized by Google

world, or the rising of thy name in the country bring thee, if, in the mean time, thou thyself harbourest any carnal will or self-interest that doth rise up in opposition to the pure and perfect will and nature of God? how art thou happy in thy prayers, if thou cast sin out at thy mouth, and in the mean time a fountain of iniquity be springing up in thy heart? What avails it towards a state of perfection to be of the most othodox opinions, the honestest society, the fairest profession, the most popular and sanctimonious form, or the most plausible performances either, the soul being in the mean time allienated from the life of God, and feeding upon some earthly trash or other, which destroys the native powers and vigour of it, and keeps it under a perpetual langour? even just so much as a silken stocking upon a gouty leg, or a princely diadem upon an aching head, avails towards a state of ease and soundness of body. Let nothing limit your ambition but a state of god-like perfection; let nothing set bounds to your loving and longing souls, but a real fruition of God himself: nay, let not that bound them neither, but the more you enjoy, see, and taste, the more let your love be strengthened; after the manner of fire, which, the more it is fed, the more hungry and devouring it grows. In a word, let nothing satisfy you lower than the highest character that can be given of mortal men, to be men *after God's own heart*, to have God dwelling in you, to be filled with his fulness, to have this real and excellent *communion with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ*. To whom be all honour, praise, and glory, for ever and ever!—*Amen*.

G. WILSON, PRINTER, LEEDS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

SERMONS,

UPON

SEVERAL IMPORTANT

SUBJECTS.

CONTAINING,

A WELCOME TO THE PLAGUE,

A FAREWELL TO LIFE,

AND

THE ANGELICAL LIFE.

BY

SAMUEL SHAW, M. A.

FOURTH EDITION, REVISED AND CORRECTED.

VOL. II.

LEEDS:

PRINTED BY GEORGE WILSON,
HUNSLET-LANE.

1804.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE I.

THE text explained - - - - - - - - - - - - - Page 2

Doct. That it is the duty of God's people to study a right behaviour towards him, and to converse with him in the way of his judgments in the time of their afflictions - - - - - - - - - - - - 2

I. Some things premised, needful to be known, concerning the soul's conversing with God, that tend to clear up my way to the following discourse - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 3

1. That it is the great duty of man to converse with God - - - - 3

2. It is the highest privilege of man to converse with God - - - - 4

3. The natural man is utterly unable and unwilling to converse with God 7

4. It is the duty of man, in all ages of life, at all times, and in all places and conditions, to converse with God - - - - - - - - 8

II. What it is for a soul to converse with God, and how it comes to converse with him - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 10

It is a complex act of the soul, whereby it entertains God into itself, and renders itself back again to him - - - - - - - - - 10

The ways and means of conversing with God - - - - - - - - 12

1. The word and sacraments - - - - - - - - - - 12

2. Duties - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 12

3. Providences; or, the whole work of God in governing the world, and all things therein - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 14

III. That it is the duty of God's people to study to converse with him aright in a time of affliction - - - - - - - - - - 16

Three Reasons thereof.

1st. Because then especially it is hard to do it - - - - - - - 16

We are then in imminent danger of being taken off from it, and that by these means - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 16

1. Our senses set us at work to converse with outward means - - 16

2. The corruptions of our hearts are then most apt to make war against heaven - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 17

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS.

Page

3. Temptations do then come strongest from without . . . 18

2d reason. That it is a time wherein we are most apt to think ourselves excused from this duty 18

3d reason. Because then it is a time when there is more special use for, and need of such converse with God 19

And that, 1. To give rest to the soul; and, 2. to give relief to the body 19—20

IV. To shew particularly how we are to converse with God in afflictions 20

Two ways of explaining this:

1. By shewing with what attributes of God we are to converse . . 20

2. By what acts of the soul:—Both brought into one 20

1st. We ought to converse with the absolute and unlimited sovereignty of God, who doth what he will 20

1. The powerful sense of it doth silence quarrelling, &c. . . . 22

2. And surpresses self-will 23

3. And begets reverence in the soul towards God 24

2dly. Converse with the perfect and infinite righteousness of God in time of afflictions 24

A powerful sense of this should make us sensible and serious . . . 25

It should put us upon self-examination 26

And work us to humiliation and reformation, an heart broken, &c. and a conversation healed of its breaches, &c. 27

3dly. Converse with the faithfulness of God which is exercised in afflictions 29

4thly. Converse with the holiness and unspotted purity of God . . 31

5thly. Converse with the almighty power of God 32

Reverence that almighty and glorious God in your hearts . . . 32

Rest upon the same almighty power 33

6thly. Converse with the unsearchable and infinite wisdom of God, especially in reference to his judgments and our afflictions . . . 35

For, 1. He knows what manner and measure of correction we need . 35

We converse with this, (1.) When it begets in us a friendly and charitable temper towards second causes 36

(2.) When it begets in us a holy resting in God 37

2. God knows when and how best to deliver us 38

3. And how to make the best use of all for our good . . . 39

7thly. Converse with the unbounded goodness, love, and mercy of God . 40

Many cannot believe the mercy and kindness of God in afflictions . 42

Others believe this, but either they cannot converse with it, or dare not take comfort in it, in a time of affliction 42

We converse aright with the love and mercy of God in afflictions;

1. When we believe and apply it, and take the comfort of it . . 44

2. When we draw virtue and influences down from it into our souls, to settle, &c. them 45

Lastly, Converse with the infinite self-sufficient fulness of God in a day of the greatest extremity 46

Particularly—

——1. By the act of creature-denial 47

——2. By the grace of faith 49

Digitized by Google

Page

——3. By delighting yourselves in God's self-sufficient fulness - 50

Use of Exhort. Converse not with creature-comforts in the time of affliction 51
——Nor with creature causes - - - - - - - - 52
——Nor with creature cures, creature relief - - - 53
——Nor with creature losses - - - - - - - 55
——Nor with flesh and blood - - - - - - - 56

DISCOURSE II.

THE connection opened, and the text explained - - - - - 60
Doct. That even the godly themselves, whilst they are in this body, are at a distance from the Lord, explained - - - - - - 62
1. We are distant from God as to that knowledge we shall have of him 64
2. As to that service we ought to perform to him in this world - 66
3. As to communion with him - - - - - - - - - - 67
1. The necessities of the body hinder the soul's communion with God 69
2. And the passions hinder this also - - - - - - - 70
This distance appears by another way of explaining it, arising from the senses, the appetite, and the fancy - - - - - - - 71
Infer. 1. We may see it was for good reason the apostle was willing to depart 75
2. See here the excellent spirit of true religion - - - 77
3. An expostulation with christians about their unseemly temper - 78

Caut. 1st. Take heed of fear for the body - - - - - - 80
1. Consider——how far fear of sickness and death may consist with that ardent thirst after union and perfect communion with the blessed God, with which we ought to be possessed - - - - 82
And, 2. How far it can stand with the sincerity of a christian - 82
2dly. Take heed of fondness of the body - - - - - 82
1. Pride not yourselves in any excellency of the body - - - 83
2. Take heed of pampering the body, of treating it too delicately - 83
Exhort. 1. Watch against the body - - - - - - 84
2. Live above the body - - - - - - - 85
3. Be content to be unbodied for a time - - - - - 86
4. Long after an unbodied state - - - - - - - 86
Obj. Shall the soul break the cage? &c. answered - - - - 87
——Would you have us pray for death? answered:——Can the soul long for the destruction of the body? answered - - - - - 87
——If we were sure of interest in Christ, &c. answered - - - 87

DISCOURSE III.

1st. THE glorified saints shall be as the angels of God in heaven - - 94
1. Not in essence - - - - - - - - - - - 94
2. Not wholly spirits without bodies - - - - - - - 94
Nor, 3. Equal to the angels in dignity and glory - - - - 94

Digitized by Google

Page

2dly. They shall be like them, 1. In their qualities; that is, - - - 95
(1) In being pure and holy. (2.) As the angels reverence the divine Majesty. (3.) In their readiness to do the will of God, &c. (4.) In their cheerful and unwearied execution of the will of God - - - 95—96
2. Glorified saints shall be like unto the angels in their way of living - 96

Use of reproof, 1. Against the carnal conceits that many Christians have of heaven - - - - - - - - - - - - - 99
2.—Against the gross, low, sensual life of professors, who yet hope to be as the angels - - - - - - - - - - - - - 101
3. This doctrine should be a powerful consideration to mortify in us the love of this animal life - - - - - - - - - - - - 103
4. This may moderate our sorrow for the loss of any created good - 107
5. Labour to begin this life on earth———Live upon God - - 109
To explain this noble life more particular - - - - - -
1. Live not upon self. 2. Live not upon any creature. 3. Live not upon ordinances - - - - - - - - - - - - - 109, 110, 111
Let nothing satisfy you but God himself - - - - - 112
1. Converse with God in all your self excellencies - - - - 113
View yourselves not in your particular beings, but in the essence of God——Look on all as God's,—and enjoy it in him - - - - - 113
Labour to enjoy grace only in Christ Jesus your head - - - - 114
2. Converse with God, and live upon him in the excellencies of all other creatures - - - - - - - - - - - - - 114
1. Enjoy all things for God - - - - - - - - - - 115

These two ways:

(1.) Use all for him - - - - - - - - - - 115
(2.) Value no creature-comfort further than as it leads to God - 116
2. Enjoy all things as partaking of him - - - - - - - 116
3. Taste and feed upon the special love of God in the creature - - 119
3. Converse with God, and live upon him in all ordinances and providences 119

To strengthen this inference,

Learn that way of living in which we hope to live for ever - - 121
Which is the noblest life we can live, and a beginning of heaven - - 121
Obj. How can men on earth live like angels? answered - - - 122
———How can this animal life permit this? answered - - - 122

Motives to this duty of living to God.

1. The last enemy to be overcome is creature-love - - - - - 122
2. To live upon God in the creature, is to enjoy it in the best sense - 122
3. It is the way never to lose any thing - - - - - - - 123

Digitized by Google

PREFACE.

IT is now more than seven months since it pleased the holy and wise God to visit my house with the plague, when some dear and christian friends from London were with me, whereby he gently touched and gave warning to myself and whole family, consisting then of eight souls, but called away hence only three members of it, *viz.* two tender babes, and one servant, besides my beloved sister, and a child of my precious friend, that man of God, Mr. G. C. since also translated, who were of those citizens that visited me. You will easily believe that I can have no pleasure to rake into the ashes of the dead, nor to revive the taste of that wormwood and gall, which was then given me to drink; and yet I see no reason but that I ought to take pleasure in the pure and holy will of God, which always proceeds by the eternal rules of almighty love and goodness, though the same be executed upon my dearest creature-comforts, and grate never so much upon my sweetest earthly interest; yea, and I see all reason in the world why I should give to God the glory of his attributes and works before all the world, and endeavour that some instruction may accompany that astonishment, which from me and my house hath gone out and spread itself far and near. I will not undertake to make any physical observations upon this unaccountable disease, nor to vindicate myself either from that great guilt that is charged upon me, as if I were a sinner above all that dwell in this country, or from those many false and sense-

Digitized by Google

less aspersions that have been cast upon my behaviour during this visitation, much like that we read of, *Matt.* xxviii. 13.; but do freely commit myself *to him that judgeth righteously*; and pray with the Psalmist, *Ps.* lxix. 6. *Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel.* Neither do I purposely undertake in this preface to reconcile the providences of the most wise God to his promises, or to salve the seeming difference between the words of his mouth and the language of his hands, between which I have only suspected some kind of jar, but have experienced an excellent harmony; *in very faithfulness hast thou afflicted me.* Whence arise all these uncharitable censures with which the afflicted soul is apt to charge both himself and his God too? spring they not certainly from these two grand causes, viz. a misapprehension of the nature of God, and of the nature of good and evil? Let the studious and pious reader search and judge. If ever therefore you would be established in your minds in a day of affliction; 1. "Labour to be rightly informed concerning the nature of God." Away with those low and gross apprehensions of God, whereby your carnal fancies do ascribe unto God such a kind of indulgence towards his children as you bear towards yours, which indeed no way agrees to his nature. His good-will towards his children, is a solid, wise, and holy disposition, infinitely unlike to our human affections. *Soli Deo competit, amare et sapere.* 2. "Labour to be rightly informed concerning the nature of good and evil." Judge not the goodness or evilness of things by their agreeableness or disagreeableness to your fleshly palate, or carnal interest, but by the relation that they have to the supreme good. The greatest prosperity in the world is no further good, than as it tends to make us partakers of God; and the greatest affliction may thus be really good also. But that by the bye: my design is to justify and glorify infinite wisdom, righteousness, goodness, and holiness before all men. Oh blessed God! who

Digitized by Google

makes a seeming dungeon to be indeed a wine cellar; who brings his poor people into a wilderness, on set purpose there to speak comfortably to them! Be of good cheer O my soul; he hath taken away nothing but what he gave; and in lieu of it hath given thee that which shall never be taken away, the first fruits of life, instead of those whom the first-born of death hath devoured. But why do I say devoured? doth not that truly live at this day, which was truly lovely in those darlings? Didst thou, O my fond heart, love beauty, sweetness, ingenuity incarnate? and canst thou not love it still in the fountain, and enjoy it in a more immediate and compendious way. Thy body indeed cannot taste sweetness in the abstract, nor see beauty except it be subjected in matter; but canst not thou, O my soul, taste the uncreated goodness and sweetness except it be embodied, and have some material thing to commend it to thy palate? Be ashamed that thou, being a spirit as to thy constitution, art no more spiritual in thy affections and operations. Dost thou with sadness reflect upon those sweet smiles, and that broken rhetoric, with which those babes were wont to entertain thee? 1. Consider duly what of real contentment thou hast lost in losing those.—For what were those things to thy real happiness? Thou hast lost nothing, but what it was no solid pleasure nor true felicity to enjoy; nothing but what the most sensual and brutish souls do enjoy as much as thou. 2. Be ashamed rather that thou didst enjoy them in such a gross and unspiritual manner. Art thou troubled because any earthly interest is violated? rather be ashamed that thou hadst and cherishedst any such interest.

But pardon me, courteous readers, this digressive soliloquy; and now suffer me patiently, whilst I speak something by way of admiration, something by way of observation, and something by way of exhortation.

1*st*, Let me call upon men and angels, to help me in celebrating the infinite and almighty grace and goodness of the eternal and blessed God,——who en-

Digitized by Google

abled me to *abide the day of his coming*, Mal. iii. 2.—to stand when he appeared; and made me willing to suffer him to sit as a refiner of silver in my house;—who carried me above all murmurings against, I had almost said, all remembrance of those instruments that conveyed the infection to me;—who reconciled my heart to this disease, so that it seemed no more grievous or noisome than any other;—who subdued me to, I had almost said, brought me in love with this passage of the divine will. I can remember (alas! that I can say little more but that I do remember) how my soul was overpowered, yea, and almost ravished with the goodness, holiness, and perfection of the will of God; and verily judged it my happiness and perfection, as well as my duty to comply cheerfully with it and be moulded into it;—who gave me a most powerful and quick sense of the plague of a carnal heart, self-will, and inordinate creature-loves, convincing me that those were infinitely worse than the plague in the flesh;—who wonderfully preserved me from the assaults of the devil; never let him loose so much as to try his strength upon my integrity, to drive me to a despondency, or to any uncharitable conclusions concerning my state;—who enabled me to converse with his love and mercy in the midst of his chastning; to see his shining and smiling face through this dark cloud; yea, kept up clear and steady persuasions in my soul that I was beloved of him, though afflicted by him;—who knew my soul in adversity, visited me when I was sick, and in prison, refreshed, strengthened, and comforted my inner man in a marvellous manner and measure, and made me appear to myself never less shut up, than when shut up. O would to God I might be never worse than when I was shut up of the plague! The not removing that affliction-frame I shall account a greater blessing, and a more proper mercy, than the removing that afflicted state—Who cleared up my interest in his Son, strengthened my evidences of his love, and satisfied and assured my soul of its happy state more than at all times formerly. I had clearer and surer

Digitized by Google

evidences of divine grace in that patient, self-denying, self-submitting frame of spirit, than in all the duties that I ever performed. The valley of tears brought me more sight of my God, and more insight into myself, than ever the valley of visions, all duties and ordinances had done. When the sun of righteousness arose upon my soul, and chased away all the mists and fogs of self-will, and creature-love, than also did all black and dismal fears, all gloomy doubting most sensibly flee before him—Who supplied my family from compassionate friends with all things needful for food, physic, *&c.* The Lord return it sevenfold into their bosoms!—Who maintained my health in the midst of sickness, in the midst of so great a death! I do not remember that either sorrow of mind, or sickness of body ever prevailed so much upon me, during three months seclusion, as to hinder me of my ordinary study, repast, devotions, or my necessary attendance upon my several infected rooms, and administring to the necessities of my sick. These ensuing Discourses were then composed, which do at least argue that, through grace, this mind was not altogether discomposed, nor body neither. Who preserved me and gave me not up to death! for I judge that I was personally visited with the plague, though not with the sickness.—Who hath given me a sincere and settled resolution, and vehement desire to live entirely upon, and to himself; which I account to be the only life of a soul, and only worthy to be called a living. Grant me this prayer, O most blessed and gracious God, for the sake of my only and dear Redeemer!

Thou, O Lord God, who art witness to all my thoughts, and words, and works, knowest that in truth and soberness I publish these things to the world, not to advance the reputation of my own silly name, or to be admired of my fellow-creatures, but for the glory of thy holy name, to beget a good liking of so gracious a Creator in all thy poor creatures, who are prejudiced against thee, and thy holy service; and to strengthen the hearts of thy servants to a most firm and lasting adherence to thee, even in the

Digitized by Google

greatest extremities; that thou mayest be admired in thy saints, and glorified for giving such power, and grace, and comfort unto men." And *O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works in and to the children of men,* Ps. cvii. 8.

2dly, Suffer me to make a short observation of some few memorable passages, out of many; possibly they may be for the future, though they should not be for you present advantage. The Lord direct you to make a right application of them, according to the emergencies of life!

1. I do thankfully record the gracious design of the holy, and wise God, in that he had secretly prepared my heart, though at the time I knew not particularly for what. I remember, that for some few weeks before, I had found a more than ordinary largeness and readiness of soul; particularly, that I had been studying the excellent mystery, and sucking out the strengthening marrow of that famous text, 1 *John* iv. 8. *God is love;* from whence I had importunately pressed upon myself the reasonableness of complying sweetly, cheerfully, universally with the will of God, little dreaming then of the plague, which was almost an hundred miles off me. Oh blessed and merciful God, who of old didst make Abraham, and yet makest his and thy children to follow thee, though they knew not well whither!

In the next place, I count it most worthy of my observation, (not unworthy of your consideration), that it pleased God to seize upon my family in the beginning of harvest; a harvest which I had too earnestly expected, too carefully provided for, and promised myself too liberally from; which folly and vanity of mind, this visitation, thus timed, did as clearly convince of (methought) as if I had seen an hand-writing upon the wall. I am ashamed, yet I will not stick to confess before all the world, (God grant it may be for the seasonable and effectual warning of any), that my vainer mind was over pleasantly, not to say eagerly, drawn out towards secular and worldly, however necessary employments and concernments: and thus I was rebuked.

Digitized by Google

Upon examination I find, that verily I have been guilty concerning my children. I do not remember that ever any man reproved me for immoderate loving of them, or could for any indulgence that could be by human eyes discerned; but oh! I see and feel it as a sword at my heart, that I loved them not so purely, spiritually, and properly in God as I ought to have done. Philosophy will easily prove it to be a more tolerable vanity to dote upon a child, than upon a kingdom; but christian divinity doth abundantly demonstrate all creature fondness unreasonable and intolerable.

The next thing that I will record shall be, the difficult task that I found to maintain a right humble, and a right cheerful frame at the same time. Oh how oft and how long did I labour under this difficulty! That sense of sin which was called in to promote tenderness of heart, being over much indulged, was ready at length to destroy that largeness and cheerfulness of soul which was so much my duty and interest to maintain: and, on the other hand, the sense of divine wisdom, grace, and love in Christ Jesus, being called in to keep up the soul from sinking, was ready to bear it up so high, as that it almost forgot that it was in the waters. Beware, Christians, and watch diligently, that godly sorrow do not settle into an ungodly despondency and inconsolable heaviness, the soul not being able to bear up under its own burden; and that a holy cheerfulness and serenity do not evaporate into an unholy frothiness and forgetfulness of your infirmities, the soul not being able to manage its own metal and motions.

I know you would willingly understand something of the frame of my heart at that day, respective to my departure out of this world: you will best read my heart in the ensuing discourse upon 2 *Cor.* v. 6. which I think was fetched from thence. I shall therefore say no more as to this matter; only acquaint you with one eminent experience relating hereunto. My mind, or fancy, or appetite, (I know not well what to call it, was sometimes inditing in me some

Digitized by Google

desires to live yet longer. I entered the lists with this temptation, and when I had fairly and calmly debated the ground and reason of such inclination, after many shifts and pretences, it came to this, I would fain persuade myself I was not yet holy enough: this I did immediately consent to, knowing it to be a certain truth; but that therefore I should desire to prolong my days upon earth, this was a falacious inference. Methought I pleased myself a while, whilst I could say, I desired only to live to be better: but after a time I apprehended a fallacy in this pretence; for the way to be perfected in holiness, is not living, but indeed dying. Christians, if indeed your souls be sincerely and powerfully affected towards perfect holiness, then sing not so much with David, *Spare me that I may recover, &c.* as with good old Simeon, who having seen God in the flesh desired to go out of the flesh, that he might see him more fully and beatificially;—*Now lettest thou thy servant depart, &c.* I cannot enlarge upon this observation; I suppose I have hinted enough to shew those pretences of many men, *viz.* that they would fain live to be more fit to die, to be, for the most part, but a kind of mockery and self-deceit.

Lastly, (that I be not over tedious), I do solemnly and sincerely profess before God, and angels, and men, that I was never so much as inclined to think hardly of God, or his good and holy ways, because of this dispensation; but did then constantly and freely proclaim, to all that came to visit me, that sin, particularly self-will and sensual loves, are the worst of plagues, and holiness the only happiness of man; yea, afflicted holiness infinitely to be preferred before prosperous wickedness.

3*dly*, Suffer me, as a conclusion of this preface, and as a result from all that I have seen and suffered to commend unto you a few excellent and necessary duties. I have much ado to forbear being large here; but I have already transgressed, therefore I will wave those common themes of remembering your Creator betimes, of hearkening to the voice of his word, before his rod speak, of living in con-

Digitized by Google

final preparation for death, of repenting and renewing repentance, &c. and only commend two or three things, which seem to me of most excellent and necessary importance;

——*petimusque damusque vicissim.*

1. "Love and enjoy all things in God." Admire divine goodness in every created excellency, and taste a divine sweetness in every created comfort. O how is the noble soul of man debased, pinched, confined, by low and sensual loves; whilst many men love the creature in opposition to the Creator, most men in competition with him, and almost all men in a way of separation from him! Oh base and degenerate affections! Let God be all things in your eye, so that you shall see, nor know, nor love, nor taste nothing but him in the world. Deliver yourselves (oh immortal souls, to whom I write) from all those low, and straitening, and starving creature-loves, and long and labour to be filled with pure, and holy, and spiritual delights, such as the angels of God have, such as the Son of God had, when he made it his meat and drink to do the will of his Father.—But this you will find more largely prosecuted and pressed in the last of these following discourses: therefore,

2. "Live purely at the pleasure of God, and maintain an universal and hearty compliance with his holy and perfect will." Believe it, you will never enjoy a firm and steady peace, till you have committed all your wills and ways to him, and wrapt up all your interests and ends in him; till your hearts be conformed to the honour of God, and your wills moulded into his will. It is a difference of wills and ends, and a distinction of interests, that beget all these ragings and stormings in the hearts of men against God: mine and thine do not only divide the world amongst men, but divide men against God, earth against heaven. Take this for a certain and undoubted aphorism, that "the grand interest of a soul is to comply with, and be one with God." Communion of hearts, and wills, and interests, and

Digitized by Google

ends, is that glorious fellowship, which a creature hath with its Creator; it is indeed the interest and honour, the duty and dignity, yea, the heaven and happiness of the reasonable creature. But something to this purpose you will find in the first discourse.

3. I beseech you, christians, be not content to say, you have chosen God for your chiefest good, but "pursue after him as such, without grudging, and without ceasing, longing to be as much one with him, in a participation of divine perfections, as our created natures are capable of." Maintain a holy and secret striving of soul towards this blessed object continually, as a thing moves towards its centre, as a soul ought to endeavour to accomplish its own perfections: stand not gazing upon a heaven to come, but labour to draw down all that peace, joy, love, purity, which heaven is, into your own souls, by growing up into the life of God daily. Reckon that you are never in a right temper, except you be in David's temper, when he waited for God, *more than they that watch for the morning*, when his soul broke for the longing that it had unto him at all times. I say not, that you should prepare for death; that seems too low, both word and thing: look and live beyond death and the grave; be lifting up your heads to discover the dawnings of the day of your redemption; be laying hold upon immortality, and eternal life. Something to this purpose you will find in the second discourse, whither I refer you.

And now except, I pray you, these poor labours, which, for the glory of my God, I make public, that since, with Hezekiah, I may not go up to the house of the Lord, to declare the goodness of the Lord, yet I may leave some monument of it in writing, as he did, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness. I will add no more, but intreat all serious and devout readers to magnify the holy name of God on my behalf, adding thereunto their earnest prayers to God for me, *viz.* that the same fire that burnt up the standing corn of my creature-comforts, may also happily consume the stubble of my creature delights

Digitized by Google

and loves; that my God would give me *a name better than of sons and of daughters*, the blessed fruits of his Spirit instead of the beloved fruits of the womb; that I may for ever live under the most powerful influences of this dispensation; and that the glory of the Lord may never depart out of the temple of my soul, as it departed out of the temple made with hands.

Now, to the God of all grace and peace be all praise and glory! To him I commit you all, and rest

Your friend and servant

In Christ Jesus,

Feb. 27. 1665. SAMUEL SHAW.

Quod sani quæsi imus, hoc invenimus ægri:
Quæ nequiit vallis visus, tulit hæc lachrymarum.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

A WELCOME TO THE PLAGUE.

Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

AMOS iv. 12.

IN this sermon of the prophet, the Lord reckons up the many fearful plagues wherewith, from time to time, he had assayed to reclaim this perverse people, the ten tribes of Israel, beginning at the 6th verse; but still concludes the relation with a doleful epiphonema, *Yet have ye not returned unto me.* It is not my business to enquire into the several plagues, either the clear meaning of them, or the particular time when they took place or ended, nor into the impenitence and stubbornness of the people; though many useful things might be observed from hence. But in the conclusion, because none of these judgments had prevailed upon them, God resolves to trouble himself with them no longer, but to destroy them utterly. All that he had done to them in the land, had not prevailed; therefore now he will cast them, and carry them out of the land, by the overflowing scourge of an Assyrian captivity. This threatening he denounces in the second and third verses, *I will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fish-hooks, &c.* And after he had reckoned up the many calamities whereby he had sought to bring them to repentance, but they repented not, and so had demonstrated the equitableness of this final judgment, he re-assumes the same threatening,

Digitized by Google

and persists in his former resolution, ver. 12. *Therefore thus will I do unto thee;* and then adds, *Because I will do this unto thee, therefore prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.*

Which words may either be understood ironically, by way of derision of all their vain confidences and refuges; and then the doctrine is, "That there is no standing before, nor striving against, nor flying before God, when he comes to execute vengeance:" which is an excellent truth, and of great use. Or else the words may be understood seriously, by way of exhortation. The doubt seems to arise from the ambiguous meaning of the word meet: signifies both to meet in a hostile manner, to assault, invade, or grapple with, as a man meets his enemy; so it is used concerning David addressing himself to fight with Goliath, 1 *Sam.* xvii. 48. *He ran to meet the Philistine;* and also to meet in a friendly amicable manner, by way of communication, collocution, salutation, or converse; so it is used concerning Isaac going to meet Rebekah, *Gen.* xxiv. 65. and concerning God's meeting of Balaam, to speak with him, and impart his mind to him, *Numb.* xxiii. 4. If we take the word in the first sense, then it is spoken by way of irony or derision, and so the meaning of the words is contained in the proposition that I have laid down. If we take the word, in the latter sense, then it is spoken seriously, by way of exhortation: and so the meaning of them may be wrapt up into this.

Doct. "That it is the duty of God's people to study a right behaviour towards him, and to converse with him aright in the way of his judgments, in the time of their afflictions." And in this sense I shall take them, and prosecute them. Besides that general, unalterable godly frame and behaviour, which God's people owe to him as a standing duty, and indispensable homage, there are some more especial behaviours and tempers which they owe to him in special cases, and are duties *pro hic et nunc*, as the season requireth: particularly, there are some special behaviours required of our hands in the time of our affliction: and these

Digitized by Google

both, 1. Towards ourselves, as self-examination, self-judging, renewing of repentance, &c. 2. Towards men, meekness, compassion, instructing, warning, comforting, &c. 3. Towards God, as we shall see anon. An afflicted condition doth call for some more especial tempers and behaviours towards ourselves and others: But these I am not to speak unto from this text. It is the soul's meeting God, behaviour towards him, conversing with him, that my text leads me to treat of, and I shall not vary from it. In handling of which position, I shall take this method.

I. Premise some things needful to be known concerning the soul's conversing with God; for I shall retain the word conversing throughout my discourse, as being a single, yet a large and significant word.

II. Shew what it is for a soul to converse with God; and how it comes to converse with him.

III. Prove the doctrine, that it is our duty to converse with God in the way of his judgments.

IV. Shew particularly, how we are to converse with God in the time of afflictions.

V. Apply it.

1. I shall premise some things needful to be known, that tend to clear up my way to the following discourse.

1. I premise, "That it is the great duty of man to converse with God." I have read, that it was a common precept that the Jewish doctors were wont to give to the people that they should single out some one commandment, and exercise themselves very diligently in the observation of it, that therein they might make God their friend, and make him a kind of amends for the breach of many others. I doubt it is a rule that too many professors live by, who not having the genuine and generous spirit of true religion, do parcel out their obedience into some little shreds of homage and devotion, and instead of consecrating their whole lives to God, do content themselves with some circumstantial and light obedience, and think themselves people of great attainments, if they do but severely tie up themselves to

Digitized by Google

hearing twice a-week, and prayer twice a-day, and a few other acts of more solemn worship. Certainly this is a penurious and needy spirit, much unlike the generous, ample, and free-born spirit of true religion. The duty, the whole duty the constant duty of man, is to converse with God, commended in Enoch by the name of *walking with God*, Gen. v. 22. where you may observe of him, that he did not only set out fairly with God, take a turn or two with him; but he walked with him three hundred years together. The same God calls for from Abraham, under the same name, Gen. xvii. 1. *Walk before me, and be thou perfect.* But it is not only the command of God that makes this a duty; if there had been no expresss commandment concerning it, yet were it the duty of every man, necessarily flowing from his relation as a reasonable creature. As man is a creature, so he must needs live upon God; and as a reasonable creature, so he ought to live with him, and unto him. Therefore hath God given unto man a noble rational soul, not only that he might talk and work, manage the creatures, and converse with the world, but that he might converse with the God, of the world, that infinite, blessed, and glorious Being. This is the very end of man's creation, as man, as a reasonable creature: this was the end of his being created in the image of God; and when he was fallen from this image, this was the end of his redemption by Christ Jesus, that heaven and earth might be reconciled, and those that were far off might be brought nigh. Sin is a sinking of the soul down to self and the creature, and redemption from sin is nothing else but a recovery of the soul into a state of favour and fellowship with God; so that whatever is expressed by faith and repentance, is contained in this one word, converse with God. It is the great, the necessary, and, as I may say, the natural duty of the reasonable soul.

2. "It is the highest privilege of man." The prerogative of man above the beast is his reason; and the glory of reason is, that it is capable of knowning, loving, enjoying,

Digitized by Google

and conversing with the supreme and infinite Good. The privilege of reason is not, as too many think, that is capable of understanding arts and sciences; that it is capable of climbing up into the nature and course of the heavens, and diving into the secret depths of the earth and sea, and the creatures therein contained; but in conversing with the infinite and glorious God. How miserably do vulgar souls abuse this noble faculty, who exercise it only in discoursing, numbering, and ordering the poor concernments of the world and the body! Yea, certainly those wise men, those scribes, those disputers of this world, as the apostle calls them, who cry up this faculty, and glory so much in it, and yet do not exercise it about that high and eternal Being, do not converse with God in pure affections, and God-like dispositions and conversations, but expend those vast treasures of reason upon secrets in nature, secrets in art, secrets in state, or any other created being, do enthral their own souls, which they say are so free-born, and captivate and confine that noble principle, which they themselves do so much magnify; for sin is certainly the great and holy shame and reproach of an immortal soul. And indeed these men, though they put their souls to somewhat a more noble drudgery, yet are really no more happy than the vulgar sort, who spend the strength of their souls about eating and drinking, plowing and sowing, or keeping of cattle. What difference, I pray you, in point of true happiness, is there between boys playing with pins and points, and old men hugging of bags and lands? The noblest sciences, the greatest commands, the most enriching traffics, are as very toys in comparison of true happiness, as the poor dunghill-possessions of vulgar men; and the wise, the rich, the learned, the honourable of the world, that take up with an employment in this world, and with a happiness in themselves, or in any creature, do as much disgrace their own souls, and as truly live below their own faculties, as he doth, that knows no higher good than food and raiment, no higher employment than to toil all his days in a ditch. For indeed, as to all

Digitized by Google

things but conversing with God, man seems to be but equal, perhaps inferior to be the beasts that perish. Doth man eat, drink, sleep, work? so do they. Doth man find any sensual pleasure which the beasts do not sensate as well as he? nay, the gormandizing emperor envied the crane's long neck, and others have envied the more able and permanent lusts of the brute beasts, because themselves have been inferior to them therein, and have enjoyed less sensual pleasure than they. If any glory in their knowledge of natural and political things, I could instance in the strong memory, great sagacity, quick fancy, wonderful perceptions of many beasts, and their strange knowledge of many secrets, which they never learned by books, nor gathered gradually by observations; and as for man's communications of his notions by words and phrases, I doubt not to affirm that there is something like to be found in beasts and birds; yea, that very beauty and flower of sound, even music, which some men magnify so much, is more fairly and sweetly uttered by the silly bird that sits solitarily upon a bough, than by the quiristers of the pope's cathedral. What solid prerogative worth naming remains to man above his fellow-creatures, but his conversing with God, which we call religion, and is indeed reason rectified, sanctified, exalted, and boiled up into its pure and primitive perfection! in so much that I have sometimes thought that I never heard a more reproachful word spoken concerning degenerate man, neither do I think that any thing can be spoken of him more shameful and dishonourable than what the apostle saith of the heathen, *Eph.* ii. 12.—*Without God in the world.* By conversing with God in the world is man truly raised above the beasts, and the godly man above all other men; nay, hereby is the godly soul advanced to the dignity and glory of the holy angels, or at least to a parity of happiness; for it is this that is their perfection and glory, as we find it described in Matt. xviii. 10.—*they also behold the face of God.* And therefore our blessed Saviour doth affirm, that the saints in the resurrection, who shall be raised above all

Digitized by Google

creature-communion, to live upon God singly and entirely, shall be equal to the angels of God, *Luke* xx. 36. In a word, this is the most real heaven, setting aside all circumstances of place, &c. the perfect and proper happiness of a soul, to see God, *Matt.* v. 8. to be like unto him, *1 John* iii. 2. to converse with the Father by the Son, as our Saviour hath told us, who best knew it, *John* xvii. 3. *This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.* By this it is that God dwells in the soul, and the soul in God, as we shall see hereafter, and the kingdom of heaven doth really enter into every believer.

3. "The natural man is utterly unwilling and unable to converse with God." An earthly mountain may as soon rise up to heaven by its own power and good-will as an earthly mind; and such minds are all natural and unregenerate. Sin, as I hinted before, is a falling from God, a sinking of the soul into self, whether sensual self or spiritual self, and a shrivelling of it up into the creature; and the sinful soul is always, like a shadow, moving upon the surface of the earth, and higher it cannot get, *Rom.* viii. 5. Would you know what is the principle object of a natural man's admiration, inclination, and ambition? the Psalmist will tell you, it is some created good, *Psal.* iv. 6. 7. Will you know what is the disposition of the natural man towards the supreme and uncreated Good? the apostle will tell you, it is ignorance and enmity, *1 Cor.* ii. 14. *Rom.* viii. 7. *The carnal mind is enmity against God.* This high duty of conversing with God in a right manner is besides the temper of the wicked man: never any such man did perform it. It is a contradiction: a wicked man conversing with God is, as if one should say, an ungodly man that is godly. But that is not all: this duty is not only out of the hands of a wicked man, but out of his reach too,—Neither can he know him, saith the apostle to the Corinthians; and again to the Romans,—*Neither can he be subject to him. Can two walk together except be they agreed?* saith the prophet:

Digitized by Google

Can man walk with God, converse with God, except he be reconciled to him? and what agreement but by a Mediator? what Mediator between God and man but Christ Jesus, who is a Mediator, as the logicians call a *medium participationes*, who is God-man? In a word, some converse with one thing in the world, and some with another, as I noted before; but all converse principally and mainly with the creature, that are not regenerated by grace, reconciled by Christ.

4. "It is the duty of man, in all ages of life, at all times, and in all places and conditions, to converse with God." It is a necessary, natural, certain, constant duty, springing up out of the very nature and natural will of God, and out of the very nature and relation, and capacity of the reasonable soul, binding *semper ad semper*, as the schoolmen speak, and admitting of no dispensation or diminution. There is no time wherein it is not a duty, or wherein it is less a duty than at another time; however we are apt to give to ourselves many relaxations from it. The first-fruits, nay, the very early buds of the tender soul, and of the springing faculties, these are due to God, and ought to be dedicated to him, *Eccl.* xii. 1. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.* Manhood is not allowed to attend unto cares and exploits, nor old age to pains and griefs, as to neglect converse with God; but whether young men build or plant, fight or study, work or marry, or manage the affairs of the house or of the field, all should be undertaken and carried on in a way of converse and fellowship with God; or whether old men sit and muse, and meditate, or lie under the pain and grievances of decrepit age, still it ought to be in the Lord. Neither doth this duty admit of interruption, no more than of cessation: there is no dispensation given us from this duty; as in no age, so in no hour of our life. As we cannot live a moment out of God, so neither ought we to live a moment without God in the world. We ought continually to endeavour to walk in subservience to, and converse with God; yea, and as far as

Digitized by Google

may be, in a feeling converse with him too. Holy David witnesses of himself, that the fear of God was continually before his eyes, and that he did continually converse with God, for so those words may be understood, *Ps.* lxxiii. 23. *I am continually with thee.* The like is recorded of many other saints, both in the Old and New Testaments; concerning whom one may well say, as the queen of Sheba concerning the servants of Solomon, and with much better reason, 1 *Kings* x. 8. *Happy are these thy servants, O Lord, which stand continually before thee.* Neither is it the duty of some few men, who have the greatest knowledge, or the most leisure; for it springs out of the relation of a creature, and out of the very nature of the rational soul; so that no soul of man is exempt from it, however many ignorant and profane persons live rather in a professed independence upon God. Neither is it a duty only upon supposition of leisure and freedom from worldly business, as some other things are, but is equally incumbent upon prince and peasant, upon him that sits in his closet, and upon him that plows in the field; yea, they that go down into the sea in ships, ought to go up to heaven in their hearts, and not only to converse with the clouds, which they often do, but above them too. A hand full of earth, and a heart full of heaven, may well stand together; for as this duty justles out no honest business, so neither should itself be justled out by any. And as this high and excellent duty agrees to all ages, and times, and persons, so it agrees to all conditions too. Poor men think that rich men may well do it, and rich men think that poor men had need to do it: prosperity thinks it hath better things to mind than a God: and adversity knows it hath worse things, but it must mind them: plenty is too full to entertain him; and poverty hath enough to do to bear up under its own burden: learning knows how, but will not; ignorance says it would, but knows not how. But, notwithstanding all this shuffling, the obligation to this duty ceases not: none so high as to be above it, none so mean as to be below it; for rich and

Digitized by Google

poor, high and low, learned and unlearned, prince and peasant, though they are divided amongst themselves by punctilios and lesser differences, yet they are united in one universal Being, meet in one and the same centre, agree in the common capacity of reasonable creatures. As religion hath an interest and a concernment in the whole of the conversation, according to that of the apostle, *Phil.* iii. 20. *Our conversation is in heaven*; so also hath it a room in the conversation of every man in every capacity: no relation, condition, action, change, is exempted from the powerful influence thereof: so the apostle describes himself, by his *living in all good conscience before God* all along, *Acts* xxiii. 1. and by his exercising himself in this thing, *to have always a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men*, Acts xiv. 16.

Now, the *fifth* step in order would be, that "it is more especially the duty of God's people to study to converse with him aright in the way of his judgments;" which is the doctrine itself, which I must not come to confirm, till I have shewed, according to my promise,

II. In the *second* place, "What it is for the soul to converse with God; and how it comes to converse with him."

Not to name those too low and improper notions that men ordinarily have of this high and spiritual matter, conversing with God, to speak properly of it, is "a complex act of the soul, whereby it entertains God into itself, and renders itself back again to him;" receives impressions from him, and gives up itself again to him; is first filled with him, and then empties itself into him. You may conceive of it after the similitude of a plant, that is influenced by the benign beams of the son, and in these beams spread itself, and in the virtue and power of them grows up towards heaven: or after the similitude of a river, that is continually filled with the ocean, and is continually emptying itself into the same. This seems to be our Saviour's elegant allusion, *John* iv. 14. where he compares a divine and godly

Digitized by Google

principle in the soul to *a well of water*, springing out from God, and continually boiling and bubbling up towards him, —*springing up into everlasting life.* Or you may conceive of it after the similitude of a glass, which receives the image of him that looks into it, and reflects the self-same image that it receives: for indeed the brightness and beauty of holiness, wherewith a godly soul doth shine as a light in the world, is nothing but a reflexion of that light and brightness wherewith the Father of lights shines into it.—And so the best of men have nothing of their own to glory in: for they behold God, but it is in his own light; they love him with a love which he hath shed abroad in their hearts; they are therefore like him, because he hath stamped his own image upon them; and so they must needs acknowledge, concerning all their acts of love, communion, and delight, as David did in another case, *Of thine own we offer unto thee.* This is indeed the true and noble converse and communion with God, wherein the life of a godly man is infinitely advanced above the life of all other men, and indeed doth nearly resemble the life of angels.—Their life is described in the holy scriptures, by a seeing of God, a beholding of him face to face; which we must not understand of a naked idle speculation, but of a real assimilation, arising from the divine impressions made upon them; a beholding of him so as to be changed into his image: and such is a godly man's life, spiritual life, his life of converse with God, consisting in a participation of God and of his grace, and a holy reciprocation or reflection of affections to him; which are indeed two distinct acts, though originally springing from the same fountain: for the love wherewith the soul loves God, is itself an efflux from him; for by loving us, he inspires a love into us; and by influences from God, we become God-like. But this converse with God is not only by the impressions of goodness from God, and the reflections of love and delight towards him, but is also seen in the various acts of the soul, according to the various impressions which God makes upon the soul,

Digitized by Google

and suitable to the various occasions of life: so we converse with God by acts, fear, reverence, joy, confidence, self-resignation, and the like.

Now, because we are in the body, and so cannot converse with God so purely, spiritually, and immediately, as the angels in heaven do, therefore it hath pleased God to appoint unto man ways and means of conversing with him, wherein he hath promised to communicate himself to the soul, and so to draw forth reciprocal acts of love, fear, reverence, confidence, resignation, dependence, and delight, out of the same soul towards himself. Now, these ways or means may be reduced to three heads, duties, ordinances, and providences; though indeed the two first may be contracted into one.

1*st*, I will speak a word or two of ordinances, such as the word and sacraments; for I shall name no more but these two. The preaching of the word is a way in which God doth usually meet the soul, to communicate life, 1 *Pet.* i. 23.; light, *Psal.* xix. 8.; warmth, *Luke.* xxiii. 32.; growth, 1 *Pet.* ii. 2.; and the soul doth answer to these impressions, as in water face answereth to face, by the acts of faith, love, joy, meekness, and holy resolution. So also the administration of the sacraments is a way wherein God meets the soul, and communicates his love, sweetness, fulness, goodness, strength, and vigour to the soul; and it reflects upon him in the acts of holy complacency and delight, cheerfulness, thankfulness, and dependence.

2dly, Duties, these are also ways of converse with God such as, confession, petition, thanksgiving, conference, singing, meditation, observation. In all which God impresses something of himself upon the soul, and draws answerable affections of the soul unto himself, as might appear in the particular explication of them; but that would be too much a digression. Only I will here note by the way, the mistake of many low-spirited christians, who know no other converse with God, than the bare performance of these things: this they count the very top-stone of

Digitized by Google

a christian's perfections, the very flower of the spiritual life. But, alas! this is a gross mistake: there is, sure, something more sweet, savoury, satisfactory in the spiritual life, than the dry duty; there is marrow in the bone, or else a holy soul would not covet it with so much fervour. Converse with God in duties is a spiritual savoury, filling enjoyment, distinct from the duties themselves. This must needs be, except we will allow to wicked and hypocritical men the same dainties that the most sanctified souls feed upon, and say, that the children's bread is common to the dogs as well as unto them. The soul doth not converse with God in duties barely, when it prays or meditates; for even godly souls themselves do many times find little converse with God in these, *viz.* when he suspends the influences of his graces, or their hearts are clogged or cloyed with earthly objects, or other wise indisposed and shut up against him. It is not speaking to God that brings the soul really nigh unto him, nor bare thinking of God that advances the soul into the excellent state of feeling converse with him; even prayer itself may prove many times an empty sound, *nor et preterea nihil*; and meditation, that most excellent and genuine offspring of the soul, may prove a poor, dry and sapless speculation. It is not enough to set up the sails, but there must be also wind to fill them. But then doth the soul converse with God in duties, when the dark places thereof become filled with his divine light, and the empty places thereof filled with his divine love, and the low and languishing affections thereof are ravished and revived with the powerful insinuations of his almighty grace; when God draws, and the soul runs; he puts in his finger by the hole of the door, and the very bowels of the soul are moved for him, as it is described, *Song* v. 4. Then doth the soul converse with God in meditation and prayer, when the Spirit of God moves upon the face of the waters, when he kisses it with the kisses of his mouth; and the shaking soul finds itself marvellously settled, the doubting soul established the frozen heart thawed, the benumbed affections warmed,

Digitized by Google

the scant and contracted capacity of it enlarged and wonderfully widened, and its slow and sluggish motions quickened into a lively and cheerful compliance with, and pursuit of the supreme and self-sufficient good; when the soul finds its legs to run after that glorious object which is presented to it, lifts up its hands to lay hold upon the strength, the fulness, the faithfulness, the Christ of God, and bearing up itself upon the wings of faith and love, flies out to seek its rest and happiness, and no longer envies the birds of the altar, for itself enters into the holy of holies, and through the arms of its Mediator throws itself into the very heart of God. In a word, and that shall be the word of God, then doth a soul converse with God in duties, when, with *open face beholding the glories of God*, it doth not only admire it, but itself is *changed into the same image, from glory to glory*, i. e. from grace to grace, *2 Cor.* iii. *ult.*

3dly, Providences, these are another way wherein the soul converses with God. Now, by providences we mean in general, "the whole work of God in governing the world, and all things therein." And so indeed a religious enlarged soul, a mind freed from particular pinching cares, low and selfish ends, converses with God in beholding and observing God's settled course of governing the world. The whole heavens, earth, and sea, and the admirable order kept up in them, do teach the knowledge of God, and draw up the contemplative soul into an observation and admiration of him in them; and the pious soul longs to find some impressions made upon itself by all these, and to be affected with God therein: it is not content with a bare speculation, but its meditation of God in these is sweet to it, as David's were, *Ps.* civ. 34. Particularly, God's providence towards mankind, as it doth most lively express his infinite love, justice, and wisdom, so we ought to converse with him therein, and in all the changes of any kind that befal man in the world, in that befal all the kingdoms of the world, the four great monarchies of it, and all other subordinate dominions; more especially in all the mutations that befal the church of God

Digitized by Google

in the world, and all men of all sects and sorts therein, but most especially ourselves. Labour to converse with that infinite mind, wisdom, and understanding that ordains and orders all the changes that befal yourselves. Now, our conversing with God in the several changes that befal us in the world, is in general by endeavouring to serve the providence of God in every change. The providence of God serves itself even upon wicked men, and upon all creatures that do least understand it; but a godly man only knows how to serve the providence of God in the things that befal him: he hath no private selfish interest of his own, but counts it his interest cheerfully and faithfully to serve the will of God, to be what God would have him be, to be without that which God would have him to want, and to do what God would have him do. Every wicked soul in the world sets up some trade for himself, and drives on some particular self-interest distinct from God: but a godly soul counts it his greatest honour and happiness to be nothing in himself, or for himself, but is wholly at the beck of his Creator; and, looking upon all his interests as being bound up in God, is solicitous for nothing else but to serve the will of God in his generation. So the life of holy David is described, *Acts* xiii. 36. *David in his generation having served the will of God*, i. e. the providence of God, say the Dutch annot. translating the words in this order. A good man eyeing nothing but the great and blessed God in the world, and knowing that he was not made for himself, but for a higher good, is only ambitious to be subservient to that infinite and sovereign Being; herein imitating his blessed Saviour, who lived not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him, *John* vi. 38. and again, to seek the glory of him that sent him, *John* vii 18. In a word, he looks upon himself, not as in himself, but in God, and labours to become wholly God's, and to live in the world only an instrument in the hands of him that worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will; that is, in general, for the conversing with God in all kind of changes in general.

Digitized by Google

Now, these changes are reduced to two heads—prosperity and adversity. In the first of these it is our duty to converse with God, and not with the creature comforts which we do enjoy from him, as one might shew at large. But I am to speak of the latter, and to shew how we ought to converse with God in that: but first I must demonstrate, that it is our duty to do it; which was,

III. The *third* thing I promised, *viz.* "To shew that it is the duty of God's people to study to converse with him aright in the way of his judgments, in a time of affliction."

And here, I hope, I need not be at pains to prove by scripture, that besides the general business of a christian's life, some particular and more especial behaviours are required of him in an afflicted state; all will grant it sure: besides, by that time I shall have declared what they are, I shall not need to prove that they are. Therefore, for the present, I shall content myself to give in three or four reasons of it, and so pass on. It is especially the duty of God's people to study to converse with him aright in the time of afflictions,

1st, Because "then especially it is hard to do it."—We are then very apt to be taken off from it, therefore we should then especially labour to pursue it, and perform it. We are then in imminent danger to be taken off from it, and by these means:

1. "Our senses do set us on work to converse with outward means," which, whilst we attend upon too eagerly, we neglect and forget God. This might appear by an induction of particular affections; but that would be too large. I will only instance in one or two for explication.—The sickness and painedness of the body calls out the mind to seek after and converse with physicians: bodily wants call us to seek after bodily supplies; and so all kind of distresses call out the soul to seek creature-relief. Call upon the sick and languishing patient, to call upon, and hang upon divine help, to converse with God; alas! he hath

enough to do to attend upon his pains and pangs. Tell him of ease, of recovery, and he can hearken to you, for that is the news that he longs to hear. Call upon the poor pined beggar to seek relief from God, to converse with him; alas! he finds such a faintness in his limbs, such a gnawing of hunger, such a restless appetite within himself, that he can groan out nothing, but, Oh that one would give me bread to eat! In a word, the soul is more naturally addicted to mind its body to which it is joined, than the God that joined it to that body. Hence you may observe two things by the way, *viz.* 1. The reason why so few persons repent in time of sickness: the sense of sickness drowns the sense of sin. 2. The reason why so few poor people, who are evermore conflicting with the necessities of the body, do not at all mind the concernments of their souls: the exigencies and straits of the body cry louder in their hearts than all the words and works of God. So that as health is the best time for repentance, so it seemeth that the best way to teach the poor is to relieve them.

2. "The corruptions of the heart are then most apt to make war against heaven." This is the opinion of him who knows the temper of man to well, *Job* i. 11. *Put forth thine hand against him, and he will curse thee to thy face.* And I am persuaded that the devil acts much by this observation, which makes him endeavour all he can to make many good men poor, thinking thereby to make them less good, though the wise and merciful God wonderfully prevents him. For indeed the soul is so naturally tender of the body that it is loth God himself should touch it; if he do, it is ready to fret and storm, and fly in his face. Converse with God! saith the wicked king, why, *this evil is of the Lord, what should I wait for the Lord any longer?* 2 Kings vi. 33. There are many corruptions of the soul that are most ready to clamour against God in a time of affliction, as fear, anger, unbelief, yea, and sinful self-love, and creature-love: an affection that can never be taught to converse with God, yet will go crying after him, when he takes away any

Digitized by Google

darling from it; as Phaltiel went crying after his wife, or rather crying against him; as Micah cried against the men of Dan, saying, *Ye have taken away my gods, and are gone away, and what have I more?* Judg. xviii. 24.

3 "Temptations do then come strongest from without." Then it is the devil's time to play his game: what, put up this reproach! what, will you sit down with this loss! up and revenge thyself. He that knows so well the temper of man's heart, so ready to curse God when he touches him, *Job* ii. 5. will not fail to touch the heart, and tempt it to curse him indeed, *Job* ii. 9. *Curse God and die.*

2dly, The 2*d* reason why we ought especially to study to converse with God in the time of afflictions, is, because "that is a time wherein we are most apt to think ourselves excused from this duty;" as if it were allowed us in our extremity to forget God, and mind ourselves only; and that not only in respect of these bodily straits and distresses which I named under the last head, but in respect of our own passions. When the afflicting hand of God is upon us, pressing and grieving us, and taking our beloved comforts from us, we are apt to indulge our own private and selfish passions, care, fear, sorrow, complaining, &c. yea to think we are in some sense allowed to indulge them. How willingly do we suffer ourselves to be drawn into a converse with ourselves, to be contracted, as it were, into ourselves, and suffer ourselves to be carried down the stream of our own passions, which at other times we should think it were our duty to resist! Even as the heart in naturals draws home to it, in a time of danger, the blood that was dispersed abroad in the body, as it were to defend itself; so the heart in morals gathers home its powers and affections, which were formerly bestowed here and there, to employ them all about itself in a time of sore affliction. And we are apt to think ourselves excusable too in so doing; so that if God himself should ask a distressed soul, as he did Jonah, Dost thou well to be careful, fearful, sorrowful, querulous, because of those afflictions, losses, distresses, that are upon thee?

Digitized by Google

It would go nigh to give him the same answer, I do well to be sorrowful, yea, and to refuse to be comforted. There seems to be allowed us some natural affections in case of extreme affliction, which how far they are lawful, I will not now dispute; but sure I am, that if such be allowed us, they must not be wild extravagants, wandering without the bounds of religion and conscience, as if God had laid the reins upon the neck of the soul, and given it leave to indulge itself in what passions it would for a certain time, as the daughter of Jepthah was allowed to go whether she would, wailing upon the mountains for two months. We are never allowed any passions or affections, sure, that do not comply with the will of God, and consist with our submission thereunto: but whatever they are, I find, that under the pretence of those, some men, are apt to be carried into strange inordinacies, and commit many passionate outrages; and indeed the best of men are too prone to suspend and interrupt that lively and feeling converse with God, which they ought to maintain even when they smart most.

3dly, "Because then is a time when there is more especial use for, and need of such converse with God." And that, 1. To give rest to the soul. In prosperity men forget God, and yet make a shift to find some kind of rest in their pleasures, friends, employments; some take comfort in their cups and companions, and indeed all are apt to fancy a contentment in creature-enjoyments. But in a time of great affliction all these are gone, or at least have no savour in them; and where shall the weary soul find rest then? Then there is no shew of rest but in God alone; when all other props fail, then either catch hold of God or fall. There is now nothing left to give any settlement or contentment to the soul but God alone; and in him there is ease to the shaking, contentment to the troubled christian. Therefore converse with God in the day of greatest affliction, which is the same counsel in effect with that of our Saviour, *Mat.* xi. 28. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and*

are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 2. There is need of it to give relief to the body also.

And so conversing with God in a right manner is the best policy, the surest way to recovery and relief. See what a speedy cure there is in it. *Ps.* xxxiv. 5. 6. *They looked unto to him, and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed: this poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.* In vain is conversing with friends, physicians, councellors, in vain is all creature-converse without this; no rest to the soul, no ease to the body in a time of affliction, without converse with God: so that a man in affliction, estranged from God straggling off from God, is altogether miserable. In a word, separate a soul from God, in prosperity his enjoyments are low, and in adversity the want of them is very bitter: so that there is good reason why a christian should study to converse with God in the way of his judgments.—But the great art is to know how. This therefore I now come to,

IV. In the *fourth* place, to shew particularly, "how we are to converse with God in afflictions." Now, there are two ways of explaining this.

1. By shewing with what attributes of God we are to converse.

2. By what acts of the soul. But I shall bring both these into one.

1st. We ought to converse with the absolute and unlimited sovereignty of God, whereby he, as a free and supreme agent, doth what he will, and none can say unto him, *What dost thou?* Dan. iv. 35. This Job often eyes and owns, particularly in chap. ix. 12. *He taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What dost thou?* This we must also eye often, and own heartily; this we may well argue from God's creating of us: he that made us thus without any constraint, can he not, may he not make us otherwise, and alter us without restraint? So Job argues, chap. i. 21. We may also argue it from the subordinate sovereignty and inferior supremacy of men; even

Digitized by Google

a monarch among men doth whatsoever he pleases, and who may say unto him, *What dost thou? Eccl.* viii. 3. 4. Yea, a very centurion hath a kind of sovereignty in his sphere, over as many as are under him; he saith unto one man, *Go, and he goeth; and to another, Do this, and he doth it,* Mat. viii. 9. And shall we not then acknowledge a sovereign power, and independent absolute authority in the great and blessed God over the whole creation, the workmanship of his own hands? So the good centurion argues, and infers, in the place last quoted. Nay, as the apostle saith in one place, *We have fathers of our flesh,* who use at their pleasure, and we do not gainsay their authority; we do not say to our father, *What begetteth thou?* nor to our mother, *What hast thou brought forth?* Isa. xlv. 10. Nay, if these similitudes will not teach you, I will say to you, as God to the prophet, *Arise, go down to the potter's house,* there I will cause you to learn this lesson; he maketh or marreth his vessels of clay as oft as he pleaseth; and are not ye in the hand of the Lord, as the clay is in the hand of the potter? *Jer.* xviii. 6. I speak the more to this, in as much as I find, that however men give God good words, and confess his dominion over them and theirs, yet when it comes to it, that he touches them in any of their darling comforts, they are ready to clamour against him in their hearts, as if he did them some wrong, if not to curse him to his face. Certainly there is some atheistical opinion of propriety, that in some degree or other is apt to steal into the most devout minds: and sure I am, we do not only barely offend, but we do ourselves much hurt; we wound our own peace, we shake the settledness of our own hearts, we put ourselves into briars; in a word, we both lessen our creature-comforts, and multiply our griefs, and aggravate our sorrows, by calling things our own; if we had not taken them to be our own, it would not have troubled us to part with them.

Be sure therefore to eye and own the absolute and unlimited sovereignty of God. But that is not all; it is not

Digitized by Google

enough to believe it, we must converse with it otherwise than by thinking of it, or assenting to it. Then do we converse with the sovereignty of God,

1. "When the powerful sense of it doth silence quarrelling, yea, murmurings, yea, even disputings in the soul." We may indeed modestly contend with men concerning their dealings with us; the potsherd may strive with the potsherds of the earth, but it must not say to the potter, Why hast thou made me thus? A pacate and quiet frame of heart is a real conversing with the sovereignty of God: so did Aaron when he held his peace, *Lev.* x. 3. and Job, when he attributed nothing unseemly to God, chap. i. *ult.*

2. "When the sense of it doth suppress self-will." This is an unruly lust in the soul, a giant-like spirit, warring against heaven, and breeding hate continually. This is that which maintains *a meum* and *tuum*, even with God himself, that sets up interests, (as the Jews set up princes, *Hos.* viii. 4.) but not by God, yea, indeed, in opposition to him. This is the seditious party in the soul that is always crying out, We will not have this man to rule over us: and when that darling interest, which this proud rival hath set up, is touched of God, and smitten and blasted from heaven, it is ready to fret and storm, yea, and to think it hath reason to be angry. If this son of the bond-woman were cast out, Abraham's family would be all of a piece, all in order, and at rest. If this undisciplined and perverse spirit were quite banished, oh, what a calm day would it be in the soul! what fair and sweet correspondence would there be between God and his creature! for certainly this is the Jonah that raises the storm, and makes the great deeps of the soul that it cannot rest, but do perpetually roll and toss, yea, and cast out mire and dirt continually. But, alas, I doubt this spirit is not quite laid, no not in the most spiritual man: the best of men are ready to nourish and hatch up some darling, some private interest or other of their own, distinct from God, and the grand interest of their souls, which God himself must not touch; some gourd or other that the cold

Digitized by Google

wind must not blow upon. He is a blessed man indeed, who doth so understand that he lives and moves in God alone, and is so overpowered with the sense of the infinite goodness and holiness of God, and the absolute perfection of his divine will, as that he reckons it his greatest perfection to be nothing in himself, nor have nothing of his own distinct from God, but only studies to be great in God, to be filled with God, to live to him and for him, to enjoy all things as in and under him, who counts it his only interest to quit all self-interest, and particular ends, and to be freely at the disposal of the highest Mind, conformable to the highest good, cheerfully compliant with the uncreated will. Potiphar had so committed all to Joseph, in the sense of his great faithfulness, that *he knew not ought he had, save the bread that he did eat*, Gen. xxxix. 6. But this similitude is too low: a godly soul should commit all its interest, its life and livelihood, and all to God, in the sense of his sovereignty, and not know ought that he hath, no not his own life, but despise it in comparison of uncreated life, as Job speaks, chap. ix. 21. Methinks the sovereignty of God speaks such language to the soul, and in it, as Eli to Samuel, *My son, hide nothing from me, keep nothing back of all that thou hast*: and the pious soul should not, with foolish Rachel, conceal any selfish interest, so as not to be willing to part with it, when its sovereign Lord and Father comes to search the tent, but (with allusion to *Amos.* vi. 10.) when God comes to ferret out all self-interests, and shall ask, *Is there any such yet with thee?* should be able to answer boldly, No, there is none. Blessed is the man that is in such a case; blessed is the man whose only interest it is to serve the will of the Lord! Well, improve the infinite sovereignty of God to this end, and work it upon and into your own hearts, that all self will may stoop to it: and let the main interest of your souls be so planted and established in your souls, that no other interest may be able to grow by it: shame your own self-will with such severe reproofs as this is, Either deny thyself, O my soul, or deny thyself to

Digitized by Google

be a creature: either be wholly at God's command, or call him not thy sovereign.

3. "When the sense of it doth beget reverence in the soul towards God." We ought not only to be subject to the rod of God, but even to reverence him when he correcteth with it; and so not only to except of the rod, but to kiss it too. And surely if the fathers of our flesh correct us, and we give them reverence, *Heb.* xii. 9. much more ought we to reverence the sovereign Father both of flesh and spirit. This is a devout act of the soul, whereby it looks up and adores the infinite and sovereign Majesty, and thinks equitable and honourable thoughts of him, even when he is in the way of his judgments. And these are the proper acts of a soul conversing with God's sovereignty in the time of afflictions. When we are silent before him, subject unto him, and reverencing of him, then we do really and truly converse with him as our almighty and absolute Sovereign. But God's authority and prerogative, though it may silence, will scarce satisfy; such a corrupt and rebellious pass are our natures grown to. Therefore,

2dly, Converse with the perfect and infinite righteousness of God in the time of afflictions; that divine perfection whereby he renders to every man what is just and due, and no more. This we are to eye and own, and sincerely to acknowledge, even in the time of our greatest extremity, after the example of Daniel, chap. ix. 14. *The Lord our God is righteous in all his works*; and of the godly Levites, *Neh.* ix. 33. *Thou art just in all that is brought upon us, thou hast done right.* Argue with Abraham, *Gen.* xviii. 25. *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* Can Righteousness itself err in judgment? Shall the timber say unto the rule, Why hast thou measured me thus? or to the line, Thou art crooked? *Are not my ways equal?* saith the Lord, *Ezek.* xviii. 25. Are not the Lord's ways equal? let your souls say so too. Be ye firmly persuaded of the infinite and incorruptible righteousness and equity of God. But that is not all; we do not then converse with the righte-

Digitized by Google

ousness of God, when we do believe it, or acknowledge it: a very Pharoah may be brought to make such a confession, *Exod.* ix. 27. *The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked.* But then do we converse with the righteousness of God, in general, when the sense of it doth give a rational satisfaction to the soul. And indeed, whereas the sovereignty of God is enough to silence, yet his righteousness had need to be called in to administer satisfaction: the former is sufficient to stop the mouth, but there is need of the latter to settle the heart. And indeed, methinks it is a heart-settling consideration: for how can the interest of the creature be better secured than in the hands of a righteous God! Where can we venture all we have better than in such a certain and steady bottom? How can we better trust ourselves than on such firm and even ground? We will trust ourselves far with an upright and righteous man: and if we hear of the miscarriage of any interest of ours at any time, it doth mightily calm and satisfy our hearts, if we are assured that it was in the hands of a just and upright person: much more rational and steady satisfaction may the infinite righteousness of God administer even in the time of the greatest affliction, if it be duly wrought into the heart. But more particularly,

1. "The powerful sense of the righteousness of God should make us sensible and serious." It becomes us seriously to ponder, duly to weigh, and in good earnest to lay to heart, all that is done to us by a righteous God. We use slightly to pass by, and slightly to esteem the words or actions of vain man; but it is not for nothing that the righteous God afflicts any man, in any measure, at any time. The voice of God, though it be not always articulate, yet is always significant. Will a lion roar for nothing? Surely every action of the righteous God hath a meaning in it. A hair falls not from our head, nor a sparrow to the ground, without him; much less, sure, do greater changes befal us without him. And in all things he is infinitely righteous. Oh how doth this call us to sensibleness and seriousness!

Digitized by Google

How ought all the powers of the soul to be awakened to attention, when the righteous God utters his dreadful voice, and the whole frame of the heart and life to be composed under his heavy hand! Now, if ever one would "say of laughter, It is mad;" one would reckon trifling to be a kind of profaneness, and judge that foolish jestings do almost border upon blasphemy, formerly not convenient, now not lawful; for indeed a vain, frothy, light, trifling spirit, in the day of affliction, is, in a sense, a blaspheming of the righteousness of God. As a consequent of this,

2. "It should put us upon self-examination." Nature itself had taught the heathenish mariners to enquire where the fault was, in a storm, *Jonah.* i. 7. ; much more may the knowledge of God's infinite righteousness teach us. So may the holy word too, that word in *Lam.* iii. 40. *Let us search and try his ways, &c.* and many others. Now do the faculties of the godly soul, being awakened, begin to cast lots upon themselves, to find out the guilty party: and certainly God hath a great hand in ordering these lots; he doth ordinarily shew unto man his sin, even by the verdict of his own heart. Conscience, I mean, is God's vicegerent in the soul: and though it is true, this judge is oft times corrupted and bribed, or at least over-ruled in prosperity, yet God instructs it to speak good sense, and to speak out, and speak the truth in the time of affliction. I believe they hit the nail upon the head, who cried out one to another, *Verily we are guilty concerning our brother,* Gen. xlii. 21. Another cries, Verily I am guilty concerning my master, concerning my people, guilty concerning my wife, concerning my children, concerning my estate, my time, my talents; and it may be all true. I believe the heathen was in the right, who looked upon his hands and feet, and cried out, *As I have done, so God hath requitted me,* Judg. i. 7.: and the Babylonish monarch harped upon a right string, after he was come to his right wits, *Dan.* iv. *ult.—Those that walk in pride, he is able to abase.* God hath not given to our faculties any infallibility indeed, but he enables them to

Digitized by Google

make good guesses; and, I am verily persuaded, doth many times lay the hand upon the right sore, and order this secret lottery from heaven; so that that faculty, or that frame, or that action, which stands convicted in the court of conscience, is seldom held guiltless in the court of heaven.

3. "It should work us to humiliation and reformation; an heart broken, and a conversation healed of its breaches." By humiliation I mean a heart broken purely, properly, and spiritually for sin. I do not mean by it, an heart broken for losses and afflictions and bowing down itself heavily under the burden of its distresses; no: nor a heart broken for sin, as viewing it only in the calamitous affects and bitter fruits of it, which I doubt not is the humiliation of most. Many may say concerning their humiliation, (to use the prophets words in a different sense, *Zech.* xiii. 6.), *These are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends*, by the loss of my friends, the loss of my health, the loss of my goods; these tears that you see, these groans that you hear, are nothing but the scars which the sore hath left behind it, and the wails which the rod hath made. I doubt our very sorrow for sin, in a time of affliction, admits of a mixture of carnal self and passion, and so of sin too. But I mean a pure, spiritual, proper sorrow and hatred of sin; which I know may be broached by sharp afflictions, and have vent given it by piercing the vessel; but that is not the proper cause and ground of it. Moses, in his joy, had an eye to the *recompence of reward*, Heb. xi. 26.; and so a christian, in his sorrow, may have respect to the recompence of his sin, I mean his afflictions; but it is not primarily and principally caused by these: for though these dreadful showers from heaven should cease, yet the stream of his eyes, or at least the fountain of his heart would not cease issuing forth bitter waters; though the righteousness of God do serve to give vent to godly sorrow, yet it is the goodness and holiness of God that gives it. Do we sorrow for sin because it spoiled us of our comforts, stripped us of our ornaments? then, sure, we think there

Digitized by Google

something in the world worse than sin, for which we should bewail it, and hate it, and so, consequently, that there is something better than God, for which we would love him. Alas! how apt are we to run into practical blasphemy before we are aware! In a word, to decide this controversy, our afflictions, losses, distresses in the world, may possibly be as a bucket to draw up this water of godly sorrow, but they must not be the cistern to receive and hold it. Serious and spiritual humiliation is a real conversing with the righteousness of God: to meet God, is indeed to fall down before him; and to converse with him, is to lie down under him: the truth of which temper is best evidenced by that excellent commentator, the life of a christian: this doth best declare the nature, and interpret the meaning of heart-humiliation. He that breaks off his sins doth best make it appear that his heart is broken for them. If you would know whether there has been rain in the night, look upon the ground, and that will discover. Oh, my friends! if the dust be laid, if all earthly joys, contentments, pleasures, concernments, be laid, you may conclude your sorrow was a shower sent into your souls from heaven.

If you see a boy both sobbing and minding his book, you may conclude he hath some right sense of his master's severity. Conversion to God is the most proper and real conversing with him in the way of his judgments: so he himself interprets in that complaint made, *Is.* ix. 13. *The people turneth not to him that smiteth them, &c.* That which happened to Moses, when he had been in the mount with God, *Exod.* xxxiv. 29. should also be the condition of every good Israelite, when he hath been with God in the valley, the vale of tears, an afflicted state, his face should shine, his conversation should witness that he had been with God; the smell of this fire should pass upon his garments, his whole outward man; the spirit of mourning should be demonstrated by the spirit of burning. If God from heaven set fire on the standing corn of our worldly comforts, we must answer him from within, and set fire on the stubble of

Digitized by Google

our worldly lusts and corruptions. Let me change our Saviour's words therefore a little, *Matt.* vi. 18. and exhort you earnestly; thou, Christian, when thou fastest, when thou humblest thy soul for sin, *wash thy face* also, cleanse thy outward conversation from all sinful pollution, that thou mayest appear to be humbled indeed: and this shall be accounted as a true and real conversing with the righteousness of God in the time of affliction.

3*dly*, Converse with the faithfulness of God. This attribute of God hath respect unto his promises, and therefore it may be, you will think strange that I should speak of this in a discourse of afflictions, as not having place there at all. Every one will readily acknowledge, that God's sovereignity and righteousness do clearly appear in his judgments; but how his faithfulness can be exercised therein, they see not. What! faithful in punishing, in plaguing, in visiting, in afflicting, distressing his creature, how can that be? Many will be ready to think rather that God is not faithful at such a time, when he denies what he had promised to continue; when he plagues David every morning, when he had promised him that the plague should not come nigh his dwelling; when he brings Abijah to the grave, to whom he had promised that his days should be long upon the land; and Job to the dunghill, to whom all the promises were made, both of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Is this faithfulness? doth God fulfil his promises by frustrating them? Notwithstanding all this, it seems that the faithfulness of God hath place in the afflictions of his people; for so saith David expressly; *Ps.* cxix. 75. *I know that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me*, if indeed faithfulness be taken properly in that place. Neither indeed need it seem so strange as some men make it; for God hath promised his covenant people to visit their iniquity with a rod, *Ps.* lxxxix. 32. *the rod of a man*, a fatherly chastisement, as it is explained, 2 *Sam.* vii. 14. where this seems to be made a breach of the covenant, and is understood by many as a promise. But if that be not a

Digitized by Google

plain promise, I am sure there is one in *Ps.* lxxxiv. 11. *No good thing will he with-hold from them that walk uprightly.* And if no good thing, then no correction neither; for that is often good and profitable for the people of God in this world, for many excellent ends, which, considering the nature of man, cannot well be accomplished without it, as might appear in many particulars; but it is not needful to run out into them. God will take more care of his own people than of the rest of the world, and will rather correct them than not reduce them. It is their main happiness that he takes care for, and he will in kindness take out of the way whatever hinders it, and give whatever may promote it. God's thoughts are not as our thoughts; he judges otherwise of health, riches, liberty, friends, *&c.* than we do. We are apt to measure God by ourselves, and our own affections, which is the ground of our mistake in this business: we mind the things that please our flesh, our senses, our appetite, our fancy; but God minds the things that concern our souls, and their true happiness. The saints are much dearer to God, and much more beloved of him, than they are to themselves; and therefore he will not give them what is sweet, but what is meet; he will give them what makes for their real and eternal happiness, whether they would have it or not. He loves them with a strong and powerful love, and will not deny them any thing that is truly good for them, though they cry out under it; nor allow them any thing that is really hurtful, though they cry after it. So will a wise father upon earth do by his children, to the best of his skill and power; much more will God then, *qui plusquam patrium amorem gerit in suos*, whose bowels are infinitely larger and stronger than those of a father. Now then, labour to converse with the faithfulness of God in the time of afflictions, which is by studying the covenant, and the promises of it, and your present condition, and comparing them together, and observing consonant and agreeable they are, each interpreting other; as also by persuading your hearts of the [illegible]

afflictions with divine love and favour, and by studying to reconcile the hand and heart of God together. But especially converse with it practically, by a holy establishment and settlement of heart under all afflictions: for, whereas afflictions in themselves are apt to beget a fearfulness, despondency, or at least fluctuation in the soul, the lively sense of God's faithfulness in inflicting them will settle and sustain it; it is a firm and consistent thing, upon which the shaking soul may settle safely, and centre itself boldly.

4thly, Converse with the holiness and unspotted purity of God. He is angry, and sins not; he corrects for sin without sin; *Fury is not in me, saith the Lord*, Is. xxvii. 4. There is no passionate, malicious temper, in the pure and holy God, no revengeful appetite to feed upon the blood of his creature: he is of purer eyes than to behold the least iniquity, and of a purer nature than any way to miscarry in any of his dealings or dispensations. Converse then with this infinite holiness of God: keep up pure, equitable, honourable thoughts of him in your hearts; take heed of fancying to yourself a God guilty of passion or partiality, or carried away with such weak and mixed affections as we ourselves are. But, more practically, converse with God's holiness in the time of afflictions, by laying even little sins greatly to heart; little sins, compared with infinite holiness and purity, ought to be matter of great and serious sorrow to a sensible soul. Again, take heed of the least miscarriages under affliction, of departing from God in the least. This I know is the great duty and care of every tender-hearted christian at all times; but, I conceive, we ought more especially to press it upon our hearts in the time of afflictions, because we are then most apt to indulge some kind of human passions, which we call natural affections, as if we had a licence to care, and fear, and grieve, and complain, not only in an extraordinary, but even in an irregular manner. Oh! let the sense of God's infinite purity, and perfect holiness, check and awe those very natural affections, be they

Digitized by Google

what they will, if they offer to exceed their bounds, and overflow their banks. But this I touched upon before under another head, amongst the reasons of the doctrine: therefore,

5thly, Converse with the almighty power of God.—That God is infinite and almighty in power, I need not undertake to demonstrate: no man hath read a leaf in scripture, nor indeed turned over one leaf in the book of the creatures, who hath not learned this. I need not, sure, turn you to any particular mighty work of God; they that instance in his letting loose the virtues of the creatures, in the case of the universal deluge, or binding up of their influences, as in the case of the three captive Jews, and of Daniel and Jonah, when he kept the fire from burning, and forbade the lions to eat the one, and the fish to digest the other, whom he had swallowed, make a poor guess at Almightiness, but a faint essay to describe it. The creation of the least creature out of nothing is an higher argument of divine power than the command of the greatest that is already created. Eye God duly in the notion of a Creator, yea, the Creator of your own souls and bodies, and you have enough to fill you with everlasting admiration, as David was filled, *Ps.* cxxxix. 14. *I am fearfully and wonderfully made.* But it is not enough to eye, or acknowledge or admire; we must yet do more, if we will rightly converse with the almightiness of God, *viz.* by the acts of reverence and dependence.

1. "Reverence that almighty and glorious God in your hearts," who can bring *quid libet ex quodlibet*, any thing out of any thing, yea, out of nothing, yea, any thing to nothing in a moment. Reverence that power of God, that can pour contempt upon princes; that can bring Job, the greatest of all the men of the east, to lie in the ashes, and make his bed in the dunghill; that can send home Naomi empty, who went out full and flourishing. Hath he done so by you, debased you when you were high, tumbled you down from the clouds, and rolled you in the dust, emptied

Digitized by Google

you when you were full, withered you when you were fresh and flourishing? Let not God lose the glory of his almighty power; reverence that glorious hand of God.

2. "Rest upon the same almighty God," who can also bring up the same Job from the dunghill, and set him with princes; and fill empty Naomi with a famous offspring, throwing into her lap one of the ancestors of the Messiah according to the flesh. The same power that caused your sun to go down at mid-day, when you least suspected, can also cause it to rise at mid-night, when you least hope.—Dwell not upon creature probabilities or improbabilities; but lift up thyself, believing soul, and be assured, that God can do what he will, and he will do what is good for them that love him, according to the dictates of the unsearchable wisdom and goodness. Thou that art rolled in the dust, yet arise, and roll thyself upon those almighty arms that brought thee thither, and are able to advance thee; as I have seen a child thrown off by his father, and thrown down to the ground in a seeming displeasure, yet clinging to the same hand, and will not let it go, till at length he rise up again by it: a fit emblem of a child of God, whom his heavenly Father seems as if he had cast off. The wounding hand of God is apt to amaze indeed, and to beget consternation and astonishment; but remember, the same hand that wounds can also heal; he that breaks us, can also make up all our breaches: let this beget confidence and dependence. God never wounds deeper than that he can easily bind up the wound again; never throws his people so low, as that they should be out of his reach. Take heed therefore of unseemly despondencies; cast not away your confidence, which shall have a recompence, if ye maintain it; a recompence, I say; for that God who can recover the setting sun, and exalt it in its beauty and brightness, and doth so every morning; who can clothe the forlorn and naked trees with leaves and fruits; who can recover the verdure of the withering grass, and doth so

Digitized by Google

every year; he can also cause light to arise to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, *Is.* ix. 2.

He who could give unto Amaziah much more than that which he parted with at his command, 2 *Chron.* xxv. 9.; who could turn again the captivity of Job, and give him double for what he had taken from him, chap. *ult.* 10.; he can surely make his people *glad according to the days wherein he hath afflicted them, and the years wherein they have seen evil, Ps.* xc. 15.; he can recompense and restore to his penitent people the fruits which the locusts and the caterpillars have consumed, according to his promise, *Joel* ii. 25.; he can recompense to his people the comforts of health and liberty, which sickness hath consumed, the comforts of friends and relations, which the grave hath devoured. He who made the springs dry, *Jer.* li. 26. can as easily make *the parched ground to become a pool,* and *the thirsty land springs of water,* Isa. xxxv. 7. as you find both elegantly joined together, *Ps.* cvii. 33—35. *He turneth water-springs into dry grounds, et sic vicissim.* Say not therefore with the captive Jews, *Ezek.* xxxvii. 11. *Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost, &c. for God can cause even those dry bones to live.* Say not with that low-spirited courtier, 2 *Kings* vii. 19. *If the Lord should make windows in heaven,* then might such plenty be in Samaria; for he did accomplish it, and yet not rain it from heaven neither: but say rather with Job, chap. xiii. 15. *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;* and with the three worthies, *Dan.* iii. 17. *Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us out of thine hand, O king;* so he is able to deliver us out of thine hand, O enemy, O prison, O sickness, yea, out of thine hand, O grave. If we despond and be dejected both in mind and body at the same time, then is our condition indeed sad and shameful; nay, we do more reproach God by such a temper in our affliction, than he reproacheth us in afflicting us. Make it appear, christians, that though God hath cast you down, yet you do believe that he hath not cast you off; and that you, although you be sorely shaken

Digitized by Google

by him, yet are not shaken off from him. Thus you shall glorify the almighty power of God in the day of your visitation.

6thly, Converse with the infinite and unsearchable wisdom of God, especially with the wisdom of God in reference to his judgments, and our afflictions: For, 1. He knows what, and what, and what manner, and what measure of correction we stand in need of. 2. When and how best to deliver us. 3. How to make the best use of all for our good.

1. "He knows what, and what manner, and what measure of correction we stand in need of." He is that wise physician, who knows what humour is most predominant in the souls of his servants, and what is the most proper medicine to purge it out; where the most corrupt blood is settled, and what vein to let it out. He is infinitely knowing of the various tempers and distempers of his servants, and can apply himself suitably to them all. And as to the measure and degree, he is also infinitely wise and exact: he weighs out the afflictions of his people to a grain for quantity, and measures them to a day and hour for duration. He did not miss of his time, no not one day in four hundred and thirty years, *Exod.* xii. 41.: so many years of bondage were determined upon the people; and after these years were expired, the very next day the hosts of the Lord went up out of Egypt. And as for measure, he observes a certain proportion, as you may see in that full text, *Is.* xxviii. 27, 28. As the husbandman uses different ways of purging and cleansing different sorts of grain, beating the fitches with a staff, and common with a rod, because they are a weaker sort of grain, and will not endure hard usuage, but bruising the bread-corn, because threshing will not suffice, and he is loth to break it all in pieces with turning his cart wheels upon it. An elegant similitude, whereby God insinuateth his different ways of correcting his people, and observing a suitableness to their strength and temper, when less would do, and more would

Digitized by Google

overdo: he must correct so far as to bruise, but will be sure not to break and spoil. He that saith to the proud waves of the swelling sea, *Hitherto shall ye come, and no further*, Job xxxviii. 11. hath the same command over these metaphorical waves, those floods of affliction, which he lets loose upon his people, and they cannot go an inch further than he hath appointed: he saith, Hitherto shall this sickness, this mortality, this persecution go, and no further; and even these storms, and this sea obey him. Now, we converse with this instance of divine wisdom, not only when we observe it, and acknowledge it, but,

(1.) "When it begets in us a friendly and charitable temper towards second causes:" when we are at peace with the whole creation, even with enemies themselves, and in perfect charity with those very plagues and sicknesses that do arrest us, rather admiring and delighting in their subserviency to God, than at all maligning their severe influencies upon us. A good man is so much in love with the pure and holy, and perfect will of God, that he desires also to fall in love with, at least he is at peace with every thing that executes it, that serves the will of his heavenly Father: he sees no reason in the world to fall out with, and fret against any man, or any thing that is a means to afflict him, but views them all as instruments in the hand of God, readily serving his will, and doing his pleasure, and under this notion is charitably affected towards them all. Observe a little, and admire, how David was reconciled to the rod, because it was in the hand of his Father, and seems to kiss it for the relation that it had to the divine will, 2 *Sam.* xvi. 11. *Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him.* This gracious soul is so wonderfully in love with the will of God, that he could almost find in his heart to be reconciled to sin itself, if it do accomplish it, and to be friends with the wrath of man, if it work the righteousness of God. And if David can be so charitably affected towards a cursing Shimei, viewing him as an instrument in the hand of God, methinks we may be almost in love with

Digitized by Google

any thing under that notion, and much rather say concerning a poor harmless sickness, Let it alone, so let it put us to pain, for God hath sent it. To this sense may a devout soul draw the words of our Saviour concerning the woman in *Matt.* xxvi. 10. *Why trouble ye the woman? she hath wrought a good work upon me:* Why do ye interrupt and disturb this disease? why do you fret against this persecutor? why do you repine at this prison? it executes the will of my God upon me. What though these men pour out their venom in such abundance? what though this disease spend its influences upon my body so plentifully? there is no waste in all this; there is need of just so much; God doth not lavish out his arrows in vain, nor shoot at rovers, as Jonathan did, who cozened his lad, making him believe he shot at a mark, when he shot at none. A soul overpowered with the sense of God's infinite wisdom in appointing, measuring, timing all afflictions, will easily be reconciled to a poor harmless creature, which is set on and taken off at his pleasure.

(2) "When it begets in us a holy acquiescence and resting in God," which is opposed to a larger and disorderly hastening towards deliverance. Then do we indeed own and honour the skill of our chirurgeon, when we do quietly suffer the corrosive plaisters to lie on, and do not offer to pluck them off, notwithstanding the smart they put us to. And surely he who believes the infinite wisdom of God, who knows what, and what manner and measure of correction we stand in need of, will not make haste to be delivered from under his hand, but composed himself quietly, as young Samuel laid himself down, and when he was called, answered cheerfully, *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*

A soul sensible of God's infinite wisdom in this particular, argues thus, Who am I, poor worm, shallow creature, that I should contend with infinite wisdom about the time or manner of my being in the world? why did not I also undertake to appoint him the time and place of my

Digitized by Google

being here? shall I say it is too much, when infinite wisdom thinks it is not enough? Cease, wrangling soul, and be at rest, for the Lord deals wisely with thee. Such a soul, so conversing with the all-wise God, dare freely refer all to him, venture all with him; if he smite him on the one cheek, he dare turn to him the other; if he take away his coat, he dare offer him his cloak also; if he takes away his liberty, he dare trust him with his life too; if he smite him in some of his comforts, he dare turn to him the rest also: for he knows that infinite wisdom cannot err in judgment, nor miscarry in his dispensations.

2. "God knoweth when and how best to deliver us." This necessarily follows upon the former. To him all times, and all things, past, present, and to come, are equally present; in one single act of understanding he doth wonderfully comprehend both causes and events, sicknesses and cures, afflictions and deliverances. Let the atheistical world cry, These are they that are forsaken, whom no man careth for; there is no hope for them in their God, as their manner is to blaspheme; still the promise stands unrepealed in both Testaments, *I will never leave you, nor forsake you*: though the case be never so extreme and desperate, still the apostle's words hold good, *2 Pet.* ii. 9. *The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations.* If all passages be blocked up, he will rather make a gap in the sea than his people shall not escape, *Exod.* xiv. And this way and time of God's delivering is the most excellent, suitable, and certain, as might abundantly appear in many particulars; but that would be a digression. In the general, be assured that God's way is the best way of deliverance, and his time is also the best time. He that sits as a refiner of silver, knows how and when to take out the metal, that it be purified, and not hurt. Here I might enter into a large discourse, and shew you how the judgment of man is ordinarily deceived, and his expectations disappointed, which he had built upon creature-probabilities, when in the mean time the purpose of God takes place in a far better and

Digitized by Google

more conformable deliverance of his servants. But it may suffice to have hinted it only.

Our duty is to converse with this instance of divine wisdom by the exercises of patience and hope. If God seems to tarry long, yet wait patiently for his appearance; for he will appear in the most acceptable time, and "in the end ye shall consider it," and acknowledge it. Take heed of limiting the Holy One of Israel, as that murmuring generation did, *Ps.* lxxviii. 41. Take heed of fixing of your deliverance to such or such a train and series of causes which you have laid in your own heads, and of engaging God to act by your method; if God be a wise agent, it is fit he should be a free agent too. Bear up, christian soul, faint not when thou art rebuked of him; *Cast thy burden upon the Lord*, and he will, in due time, find out a way, either of lessening it, or removing it. *You have heard of the patience of Job, and you have seen the end of the Lord*, James v. 11. Be you patient, and you shall see it too; a better end than ever you could have accomplished by your own art and industry. In the mean time, cherish in your hearts a lively hope of an happy issue; for your lives and comforts are all hid in him, in whom also are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. As the consideration of infinite wisdom, in knowing how and when best to deliver us, may settle our hearts that they do not rise up as a foam upon the waters through impatience; so it may bear up our hearts, that they do not sink within us, as a stone in the waters through desperation.

3. "God knoweth how to make the best use of all for our good." I say, of all, both of the affliction, the manner and measure of it, of his delay, and of the season which he chooses to redeem us in. He can make Paul's imprisonment turn to his advantage, *Phil.* i. 19. Job's captivity to redound to his far greater state, chap. *ult.* Joseph's banishment to make him great, and Manasseh's to make him good. This is a large theme, and therefore I dare not rifle into it particularly; take all in one word from the apostle, *Rom.*

Digitized by Google

viii. 28. *All things do work together for good to them that love God.* Whatever the premisses be, the only wise God knows how to draw a happy conclusion from them. Get a firm belief of this radicated in your hearts; and converse with the wisdom of God, in this instance of it, by the great grace of self-resignation. The sovereignty of God may well work us into a resignation of our interests, and comforts, and concernments to him; but this infinite wisdom of God ought in reason to work us into a resignation even of our very wills unto him. Oh! this debasing of self-will, this self-resignation is a noble and ingenuous act of a pious soul, (for so I dare call him in whom it is found), whereby it honours God greatly in all that comes upon it! A godly soul, considering itself ignorant of many things, burdened with many corruptions, and clogged with an animal body, senses, appetite, fancy, which are always calling for things inconvenient, if not unlawful, doth conclude it would not be good for it to be at its own finding, or caring, or carving; and duly eyeing that infinite mind and understanding, who, in a wonderful, unaccountable manner, orders all things, and all events, to the best and certain issue, is so mastered by, and indeed enamoured with the sense of it, that he renounces his own wisdom, and throws out his own clamorous will, and complies readily with the all-wise God. This is truly to converse with the wisdom of God, when we do out of choice refer ourselves to it, and roll ourselves upon it. Every bare acknowledgment of divine wisdom is not a proper conversing with it; but when the same is wrought into the soul, and the lively sense of it doth so overpower the heart, that the will is prepared to close readily with such methods as God shall please to use to accomplish his own ends, then do we properly and feelingly converse with God, under the notion of the all-wise God. But this of self-resignation I spoke something to under the first head, and much of that which is spoken there may be indifferently applied hither. Therefore,

7thly, Converse with the unbounded goodness, love,

Digitized by Google

and mercy of God. God is infinitely and unchangeably loving and merciful to his people: *he is good*, saith the psalmist, and *he is love*, saith the apostle, 1 John iv. 8. Those dreadful and terrifying apprehensions which men have of the blessed and good God, as if he were some austere and surely majesty, given to passion and revenge, are apt to destroy that cheerful and ingenuous converse with him, which the creature should maintain with its Creator at all times. But then we are most prone to entertain those apprehensions, and to harbour such unseemly notions of him, when he appears in the way of his judgments, when we take a view of him in the ruins of our comforts, the blood of our friends, the spoil of our goods, and in the distresses of our lives. We are apt to frame notions of God according to what we find in our own disposition, to fancy a God like unto ourselves; and therefore we cannot eye an afflicting God, but we presently conclude an angry God; as though the eternal and pure Being were subject to passions and changes as we are. These apprehensions being once drunk into the soul, it becomes unhinged presently, and almost afraid to behold the face of Love itself, but flies and hides itself, as Adam in the garden: or if the soul do converse with God at all, it is as a city that is besieged converses with the enemy without, *viz.* sending out to seek peace, and to obtain a cessation of arms. And so a soul may bestow much upon God, surrender up the castle, give him all that he hath almost, not for any love that he bears to him, but as Joash gave Hazael a present of gold and precious things, to hire him to depart from him, 2 *Kings* xii. 18. Oh! then they will up and do any thing, yea, circumcise their lives, as Zipporah circumcised her son, *Exod.* iv. 25. to escape the hands of an angry God. Every one will converse with God as an enemy in time of extremity, hang out a flag for peace, send presents, pay homage, send ambassadors to entreat his face; but few know how to converse with the goodness and mercy of God, with him as their dear and holy friend in a time of affliction, freely and cheerfully. Now, there seems

Digitized by Google

to be a double account to be given of men's not conversing with the goodness and mercy of God in the time of afflictions.

1. "Many cannot believe the mercy and kindness of God, when he is in the way of his judgments." If it be so, why am I thus? cries the poor soul, struggling under its burden, and travelling in pangs to be delivered of its griefs. Thus unbelievingly argues Gideon, who was otherwise famous for faith, in the time of his bitter bondage under the Midianites, *Judg.* vi. 13. when an angel from heaven was sent to assure him of the good-will of God towards him, he could not entertain the news, nor believe the report, because of the anguish of his soul, but cries out, *Oh, my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why is all this evil befallen us?* No, the Lord hath forsaken us, for he hath delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. The sad soul is ready to cry concerning Christ's gracious presence, as the two sisters concerning his personal presence, *John* xi. 21—32. *Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died: Lord,* if thou hadst been here, if thou hadst loved me, if thou hadst any delight in me, my brother had not died, my husband, and wife, my children had not died; I had not been thus plagued, afflicted, wounded, tormented, as I am. Hence we have those many complaints of the afflicted soul up and down the psalms, *Hath the Lord forgotten to be gracious? is his mercy clean gone? hath he shut up his tender mercies in anger?* and many such like. The smart of our senses is apt to pervert the judgment of our minds; and the sense of bodily evils is ready to destroy all sense of the infinite and unchangeable goodness and love of God. Now, this great evil seems to arise from these two causes, *viz.* our measuring of God, and his divine dispositions, by ourselves and human passions and affections, as I hinted before; and our measuring the love of God too much by the proportion that he gives us of worldly prosperity. Wo to him in a day of distress, who was wont to judge of divine love by the things that are before him, as Solomon calls the things of this

Digitized by Google

world, *Eccl.* ix. 1. This, I say, is the temper, the infirmity of many in the time of afflictions, though indeed there be no reason for it: for why should we conclude harshly concerning Job upon the dunghill, any more than we would conclude charitably concerning Ahab on the throne? Besides, the scripture teaches expressly, that the love of God doth stand with correction, *Ps.* lxxxix. 33. *I will visit his iniquity, but my loving kindness will I not take from him.* Nay, it seems as if it could not well stand without it, *Heb.* xii. 6. *Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*

2. Others do indeed believe the goodness and mercy of God to them in a time of affliction; "but either they cannot, or dare not, or will not converse with it, nor take comfort in it." They remember God with the psalmist, *Ps.* lxxvii. 3. *i. e.* the goodness, bounty, mercy of God, saith Mollerus, and yet at the same time are troubled; their hearts are unquiet, fluctuating, tumultuous within them: the soul is so impressed with the sense of sin, which it hath contracted from the consideration of its sufferings, that it dare not presume to meddle with mercy; but though this mercy of God be its own, yet it is ready to think that it is a duty to forsake its own mercies, as though it heard God chiding it in the words of Jehu to Joram's scout, *2 Kings.* ix. 18. *What hast thou to do with peace? what hast thou to do with mercy? turn ye behind me.* An afflicted soul hath much ado to believe it to be a duty to converse with the goodness and love of God in a time of affliction. It easily agrees to converse with the justice, holiness, and power of God indeed; but thinks it very improper and unseasonable, if not unsafe, to converse with his mercy. It is ready to cry, with Solomon, presently, *In the day of prosperity rejoice, but in the day of adversity consider;* or with the apostle, *If any be afflicted, let him pray; if he be merry, let him sing psalms.* Conversing with the goodness of God seems not to be a duty at this season. I confess this is a high and hard duty. Every smatterer in religion will cry

Digitized by Google

in his affliction, *Thou art just and righteous, O Lord:* but, *Thou art good and merciful; blessed be the name of the Lord,* is the voice of a Job only, chap. i. 21. But it is a duty, though a hard one, and affording much pleasure and contentment to them that are exercised therein. That the kindness and benignity of God doth not fail, that his love is not broken off from his people, no, nor suspended neither, when he afflicts them most, is most certain: for though he works changes, in and upon us, yet himself is eternally and unchangeably the same, *Jer.* i. 17. and though some of his dealings towards his people seem to be rough and severe, yet, if we judge rightly of them, they are all mercy and truth towards them that keep his covenant, *Ps.* xxv. 10. And that the people of God ought to converse with this divine love and mercy, even in their greatest afflictions, is as clear. To this purpose I might alledge the forequoted example of holy Job, and might enforce this doctrine from the apostle's words, *Philip.* iv. 4 and *James.* i. 2. *Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;* and from many good reasons too, if it were needful. I know indeed that it is a hard thing to keep up a right frame towards, and converse rightly with the righteousness and goodness of God at the same time: the one frame is ready to justle out the other. Sorrow is apt to contract the heart, and destroy the large and cheerful temper of it; and joy dilates and enlarges it, and is ready to make it forget its grief. But though it be hard, yet it is possible: these two may well consist in the same soul, according to that in *Ps.* ii. 11.—*Rejoice with trembling.*

But how must we converse with the love and mercy of God in the time of afflictions? I have partly prevented myself in this already, but I shall speak a little more distinctly of it. We do not then converse with the goodness and mercy of God, when we barely think of it, or acknowledge it; but,

1. "When we believe and apply it, and take to ourselves the comforts of it:" when we look through the clouds

Digitized by Google

that are round about us, and quite cover us, and by the eye of faith behold the Fountain and Father of light; when we can look beyond the frowns that are in his face, and the rod that is in his hand and see the good-will that dwells in the heart of God towards us: more especially,

2. When we do not only see and believe it, but also "draw virtue and influences down from it into our souls, to establish, settle, and satisfy them." Not so much when we see it, as when we taste it; when we feel the Son of righteousness warm us, though it does not dazzle us, and though we cannot perceive it to shine upon us, yet we find it to shine in us. We do then converse with the love and mercy of God in an afflicted state, when the same doth bear us up, not only from utter sinking, but even from inordinate sorrowing; when we draw a virtue from it into our souls to sustain them, yea, and to cherish them too. Thus Job comforts himself in his living Redeemer, chap. xix. 25. and the psalmist in the mercy of God, even when he was ready to slip, *Ps.* xciv. 18. 19. In the multitude of my thoughts *within me, thy comforts delight my soul.* In a word, we converse with divine goodness, when we are really warmed with it, and with almighty love, when we rejoice in it, and can with holy venturousness, and humble confidence, throw ourselves into the very bosom of it; when we receive impressions of it from the Spirit of God, and are thereby moulded into a temper suitable to it, and becoming it; for then indeed do we most happily converse with the love and goodness of God, when we for our part do live upon it; when we, being assured of an interest in a loving and good God, do render up ourselves also unto him, in the most beautiful and becoming affections of love, joy, confidence, and holy delight. This is an excellent frame; and sure I am it is much for our interest thus to converse with God in the time of our afflictions. It is a high way of glorifying God, and bringing much credit to religion: and indeed he who keeps up this frame, can be afflicted but in part: he escapes, the greater half of the evil; for though it be never so stormy a time

Digitized by Google

without him, a storm upon his house, upon his goods, upon his relations, yea, upon his own body, yet it is a calm day within; in the soul there is peace and tranquillity.

Lastly, and indeed everlastingly too, we are to converse with the infinite self-sufficient fulness of God, in a day, of the greatest extremity: that is, as if I should say, not with any one single attribute, but with the very Godhead of God, the immense perfection of God, the allness of the Deity. Oh! how seasonably doth this blessed object present itself to the soul in a time of afflictions, losses, mortalities, persecutions, when we are most emptied of creature-enjoyments, and the emptiness of them doth most appear! for upon these two doth our conversing with God much depend. I need not tell you how apt we are to live beside God, when we have our fill of creature-delights: whilst we can entertain our hearts with a created sweetness, we foolishly forget and neglect the supreme Good. And so fond and unreasonable is this affection, that no warnings, no precepts will serve the turn; God is forced to break that off from us, from which we would not be broken. Sure I am, the blessed and bountiful God envies not his servants any of their creature-comforts or delights; but he loves them, as I said before, with a strong and powerful love, and will not suffer them to live so much to their losses as they do, when they spend noble affections upon transitory things, in the everlasting enjoyment of which they could never be happy. Now, afflictions are a negative, if we speak properly, even as sin is; and whenever we are afflicted in any kind, we are emptied of some created good; as poverty is nothing but the absence of riches; sickness the want of ease, of order, of health in the constitution; restraint is the loss of liberty, *&c.* So then it appears, that in a time of affliction God is emptying us of creature-enjoyment; for indeed affliction itself is little or nothing else but such an emptying or deprivation: and that then the emptiness of the creature doth most appear, I suppose all will grant. The sick person looks upon his decayed strength, and withering members, and is feelingly convinced

Digitized by Google

of the truth of the scripture,—*All flesh is grass.* Another casts about his eyes with Samson, and sees heaps upon heaps, and cries out like one that feels the weight of his own words, *Childhood and youth are vanity:* or, Alas! how soon is the desire of one's eyes taken away with a stroke! Another sees his goods carried away before his face, and his house on fire before his eyes, and then cries out, that he hath a real proof of the vanity of those things, which Solomon had long ago observed, *Prov.* xxiii. 5. *Riches make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle towards heaven.* Whilst we see the creatures stand, we will not believe but they are stable; whilst we see them fair and flourishing, we cannot rightly lay to heart the withering nature of them; but when we see them cut down, we then conclude they were but flowers; when we see them flitting, we conclude they are shadows; when God pours them out upon the ground, we are then convinced that they were unstable as water: to shew us what the best of our creature-enjoyments are, God is forced to take them quite away, that they may be no more.

Now then, in such a case, at such a time, converse with the infinite self-sufficient fulness of God. Oh! now it is seasonable, now it is your duty, nay, now it will be your greatest policy. If that channel, that creature-channel be stopt, in which your affections were wont to run too freely, turn the stream of them into their proper channel in which they may run freely, and neither ever meet with obstruction, nor ever overflow. Let your soul grow up into acquaintance and union with God by creature-breaches and disappointments. More particularly, converse with the self-sufficient fulness of God.

1. By the act of creature-denial. The eyeing of an infinite, absolute, uncreated, fulness in a right manner, take off the soul from all created objects, earthly things; even as the beholding the sun in its glory dazzles the eye to all things below. God become so great in the eye of the soul, that it cannot see the poor motes of worldly comforts. Give

Digitized by Google

a soul a feeling taste of the infinite sweetness and fulness of the Fountain, and its thirst after the poor puddles of the world is presently abated, if not perfectly quenched, according to that of our Saviour, *John* iv. 14. *Whosoever shall drink of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst, i.e.* not after any other thing. Like unto which is that gospel-promise, *Is.* xlix. 10. *They shall not thirst*, who do enjoy these springs of water. When this fountain is opened in the eye of the soul, and the soul begins to taste of it, it longs to drink deeper of that indeed; but as for all other waters, waters of the cistern, the soul looks upon them as not being, or at least as being bitter, waters of Marah in comparison. We do then truly converse with the infinite self-sufficient fulness of God, when we look upon all created good with a noble disdain, are content to part with it; or if we do still enjoy it, are resolved to enjoy it only in God, and so look upon it, and love it, only as a beam from the Father of lights, as a drop of the infinite Fountain of all perfections. Tell me, is it not a poor and low thing that many professors do, who acknowledge and magnify the uncreated goodness, the fulness of God, and yet at the same time do covet and court the creature with all eagerness, and their worldliness is apparently too hard for their religion? Methinks I hear God speaking to such seeming friends as Delilah to Samson, *Judg.* xvi. 15. *How canst thou say, I love thee, when thy heart is not with me?* For these men's hearts, methinks our Saviour's doctrine should strike cold, *Mat.* vi. 21. *Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*: and those words of his beloved apostle, 1 *John.* ii. 15. *If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* Let a man pretend and profess what he will, and in words magnify the fulness and sufficiency of God as much as he will, if in the mean time his soul be bound up in the creature, such a man's religion is vain; nay, indeed his profession of God becomes a real reproaching of him, and a blasphemy against reason itself. Let your low esteem of all created good in comparison of the supreme Good, your rea-

Digitized by Google

diness to quit your title to ever creature-comfort, and in the meantime your care to live beside it, witness the true and honourable esteem, the true and feeling sense that you have in your hearts of the infinite and self-sufficient fulness of God: for however men may make a shift to cheat themselves, God is not truly great in the soul till all other things become as nothing; neither doth the soul rightly converse with his infinite fulness, so long as any thing stands in opposition to it, or competition with it.

2. Converse with the self-sufficient fulness of God by the grace of faith; I mean by that act of it, whereby we do interest ourselves, and, as it were, wrap up our own souls in this fulness, and make it our own. And herein there is no danger of an humble soul's being too bold or venturous; for the proclamation is full, and the invitation free, *Is.* lv. 1. *John* vii. 37. *Rev.* xxii. 17. *Whosoever will let him take the water of life freely.* What Seneca says of the soul, in regard of the divine original of it, may sure be better said of a godly soul, in respect of the divine nature and qualities of it, *Illum divino delectant, nec ut alienis interest, sed ut suis*; "It doth not converse with things divine, as with another's, but as its own." And indeed we cannot truly and comfortably converse with the infinite perfection and fulness of God, if we have no title to it; but then we converse with our own God, not another's; when the soul is able to say, All the fulness of power, wisdom, goodness, is all mine in my Head Christ Jesus, for in him all this fulness dwells, *Col.* ii. 9. and he dwelleth in me; in him are hid all these treasures, *Col.* ii. 3. and "my life also is hid with Christ in God," as theirs was in *Col.* iii. 3. You see then that a soul cannot converse with the infinite fulness and self-sufficiency of God, but by Christ; for it is in and by him that we receive of divine fulness, *John* i. 16. Hence was that of the devout father, *Tolle meum, tolle deum!* to which I may add, *Tolle Jesum, et Tollis meum.* The fulness of a fountain is nothing to me, except it be mine. There is bread enough in my father's house, says the poor

Digitized by Google

prodigal, but for all that I perish with hunger; so is there living waters evermore in this uncreated life, this infinite spring of all perfection; yet many souls are choaked with thirst, because the fountain is not theirs. It is a fountain sealed, as Solomon speaks in another case. *The well is deep,* and they *have nothing to draw with,* as the woman said concerning another well, *John* iv. Therefore be sure you get an interest in the fulness and sufficiency of God, or, as Solomon speaks in another case, *Prov.* v. 15. *Drink waters out of thine own well.*

3. Converse with the self-sufficient fulness of God, by delighting yourselves in it. Drink of this fountain, yea, drink abundantly, ye beloved of God, *Cant.* v. 1. yea, lie down by it, *Ps.* xxiii. 2. yea, bathe yourselves wholly in it; *Enter into the joy of your Lord;* lie down in his bosom, spread yourselves in his love and fulness. The beloved disciple leaning upon the breast of his Lord at supper, was but a dark shadow, a poor scant resemblance of a beloved soul, which, by the lovely acts of joy, confidence, and delight, lays down in the bosom of Jesus, and doth not feed upon him, and his all-sufficiency. Then do we converse indeed feelingly and comfortably with the infinite fulness, when the soul is swallowed up in it, doth rest in it, is filled with it, and centred upon it. Oh the noble and free-born spirit of true religion, that disdaining the pursuit of low and created things, is carried out with delight to feed, and dwell and live upon uncreated fulness! Then is a soul raised to its just altitude, to the very height of its being, when it can spend all its powers upon the supreme and self-sufficient good, spreading and stretching itself upon God with full contentment, and wrapping up itself entirely in him. This is the soul's way of living above losses; and he that so lives, though he may often be a loser, yet shall never be at a loss. He who feeds upon created goodness or sweetness, may soon eat himself out of all; the stock will be spent, and which is worse, the soul will be dried up that hath nothing else to nourish it. But he who lives upon uncreated fulness,

Digitized by Google

is never at a loss, though he lose never so much of the creature: for who will value the spilling of a dish of water, who hath a well of living water at his door, from whence he had that, and can have more as good, though not the same.—Nay, to speak properly, this is the only way to lose nothing: for how can he be properly said to lose any thing who possesses all things? And so doth he, I am sure, who is filled with the fulness of God. Be sure, therefore, that in the want, in the loss of all things, you live upon the Fountain-fulness; delight yourself in the Lord, after the example of the prophet *Habakkuk* iii. 17, 18.

I have gone through the doctrinal part of my discourse upon these words, which was the thing I mainly intended. Many inferences might be drawn from it; but I shall content myself to forbid, and so, as it were, to remove out of the way some things that hinder this great duty, and so shut up all with one word of exhortation.

1. Converse not with creature-comforts," the poor, low, and scant enjoyments of this world, for so I may well call them. Though they be ever so high in the opinion of them who have them, and never so large as to the proportion that any one hath of them, they are low in comparison of that high and supreme Good for which the soul was made, and scant as to any real happiness or satisfaction that they can possibly give; for indeed those sinful and sensual souls that take up their rest and happiness most in them, are not properly satisfied, but surfeited; not filled, but for the present glutted with them. These are many unlawful and hurtful ways of the soul's conversing with created comforts: I will not run through them all, as not intending any large discourse upon these heads. Converse not with them, fondly delighting in them, and doating upon them; especially take heed of this when God is shaking his rod over any of them. Doth God arise and begin to plead with you in Judgment, laying his hand upon any of these, and threatening to take them from you? Oh then, hands off! touch them not. What an unseemly and indeed monstrous

Digitized by Google

sight is it to see a creature pulling and tugging against his Creator, and maintaining his supposed right against heaven itself! Is it for a heaven-born soul to stand gazing and doating upon, or passionately weeping over created friends, carnal liberty, corporeal health, houses made with hands, things below God, yea, and below itself too? Pore not too much upon them; value them only in God, and refer them freely to him. If you can say you have any thing of your own, make much of it, and spare not; but give unto God the things that are God's; and by that time you have done so, I think you need not doat upon what is left. We ought indeed at all times to enjoy all our creature-comforts with hearts loosed from them; but if formerly our hearts have been too much joined to them, it is now time to loosen them.

2. "Converse not with creature-causes in a time of affliction." This is a strange kind of atheistical temper, into which we are very prone to fall. I speek properly when I say fall; for it is indeed a falling down from God in our hearts, in whose infinite essence all creature causes are lapt up, and in whose hand the several successes and events of them all do lie. Let a beast, that judges by sense, kick at the poor thorn that pricks him; but let rational souls fix upon the highest and supreme Agent, who, in an infinite, powerful, and skilful manner, uses what creature he will, for what end he will, and sends it of an errand which itself knows not. Why do we run hunting poor partridge-instruments upon the mountains of contemplation? Shall the noble faculties of an immortal soul spend themselves upon such an inquisition? or is it just to pursue an innocent creature out of breath, for being an instrument in the hand of God; to quarrel with the sword, because it suffered itself to be drawn; or beat the air, because it is infected?—This were indeed to go out with the king of Israel, with much warlike prepartion, to catch fleas. I deny not but that wise men may look into second causes, and make many profitable observations from them, both for present

Digitized by Google

and future, and all men may and ought to learn many wholesome lessons even from the instrument that afflicts them. But sure I am, a godly man will not dwell upon these; he will not fix here, but readily resolve all into an higher cause, and so falls to converse with that: much less will he blame or murmur at a poor harmless arrow, that flew no further than it was shot, and pierced no deeper than it was bidden. Yea, though the second cause were a sinful cause, a rational agent, and so consequently acted by malicious and evil principles, yet a godly soul knows how to distinguish upon him and his action: he hates him as a sinner, but comports well enough with him as God's instrument; and though he condemns his action as it varies from God's commands, yet he approves of it as being ordered by God's hand and counsel. David hated cursing as much as any man; yet did he eye the hand of God in every thing, and comply with it too, that there was a time when he said concerning Shimei, *So let him curse.* Concerning this I hinted something before under an another head:—— Therefore,

3. "Converse not with creature-cures, creature relief." These may indeed be looked out after, and safely made use of when they are found: nay, I will add further, that they are to be sought diligently, and used carefully. Those who know the infinite sovereignity, power, and wisdom of God, will not tie him to means, much less to those or these particular means: but, on the other hand, they that understand God's usual and ordinate way of acting, governing, and upholding the world, will not tie him up from means; no, nor expect that he should appear for their relief immediately and miraculously: though if any one have a miraculous faith, truly grounded upon some special and particular promise, I will not contend with him; only I would desire to see his miraculous faith justified by some miraculous works, which I conceive do always attend it. But the converse with creature-cures, which I forbid, is the immoderate seeking of them, or the inordinate using of them.

Digitized by Google

—To seek after means in themselves unlawful, can never become lawful: but I speak not of these. For although some are come to that height of atheism and abjuration of God, as to retain the devil himself for a counsel in a time of straits, as Saul did, and contract with the prince of death for the preservation of life in time of sickness, as Ahaziah did; and I doubt very many do fall into acquaintance with that evil spirit, and receive assistance from him before they be well aware, by meddling with unphisical unscriptural, unwarrantable cures; yet the greatest danger is not in these; *in locitis perimus omnes*; the greatest danger is of miscarrying about things in themselves lawful, and that is chiefly by those two ways which I named but now. Take heed, therefore, of immoderate seeking after created helps; be not anxious, perplexed, tormented in mind by a passionate desire of any of these. Oh what a raging and unquenchable thirst have many men after creature-cures! they will move heaven and earth, and almost hell too, (with her in the poet), but they will find out relief. Give me a physician, or I die, says one; give me trading, good markets, a plentiful crop, or I am undone, says another. What, man! is thy life lapt up in a pill, or incorporated into a potion? is thy main happiness in the abundance of these things here below? or wilt thou say to the wind, Blow here in this quarter, and nowhere else? tie up the supreme and free Agent to a form and method of working? Let not such a profane disposition be found amongst us. Again, if you have found out hopeful creature-cures, take heed of using them in an inordinate manner, laying stress upon them, looking earnestly on them, as though they, by their own power and proper virtue, could make the lame to walk, or the sick to recover. Eye not, much less depend upon the virtue of any created means, as distinct from God; but acknowledge the power, and virtue, and goodness of every created being, to be the power, and virtue, and goodness of God in that creature; and so consequently use it in subordination and subserviency to the supreme Cause, who

Digitized by Google

and at pleasure let loose or suspend the influencies and virtues of every such means.

4. "Converse not with creature-losses in a time of affliction." The sinful soul that hath struggled off from God, and centered upon the creature, is always intemperate and restless: if it be disappointed in its converse with creature-cures, and sees that for all these his comforts are cut off, health, liberty, friends, are perished; then he fails to converse with his losses, and spends the powers of his soul in discontents, and many dismal passions. Oh then! alas! I am undone! *What shall I do, for the hundred talents? I am the only man that hath seen affliction: no sorrow like unto my sorrow:* I shall go softly all my days, for the joy of my heart is perished, the delight of mine eyes is cut off. Thus Rachael weeps for her children, and will not be comforted; Rizpah attends the carcasses of her sons, and will not be parted from them, 2 *Sam.* xxi. 10. It is a strange thing that a soul should live upon its losses, and yet how many do so? Their very soul cleaves to the dust, where their creature-comforts are interred; whose souls are so much bound up in the creature, that they will needs live and die together with them. If God smites the gourd, and make it to wither, Jonah droops, and will needs die too, *Jonah* iv. 8, 9. If Joseph be missing awhile, Jacob will not be comforted; no, he will go down into the grave unto his son mourning, *Gen.* xxxvii. 35. Who would have thought to have heard such words from such wise men, as a prophet and a partriarch! Oh the strange and unbounded power which this unseemly creature-love hath obtained over the best of men! which makes me call him a happy man, almost more than a man, a compeer of angels, who hath learned to converse with God alone. Well, converse not with creature-losses; let not your soul take up its lodging by the carcasses of your created comforts, with Rizpah; dwell not upon the lowest round of the ladder, but climb up by it to the meaning of God, and to some higher good, and more excellent attainment. They live to their loss who

Digitized by Google

live upon their losses, who dwell upon the dark side of the dispensation; for every dark providence hath one bright side, wherein a godly soul may take comfort, if he be not wanting to himself.

5. "Converse not with flesh and blood." By flesh and blood, I suppose, the apostle means no more than men, *Gal.* i. 16. And indeed, if we confer with men only for counsel, and repair to men only for comfort in a time of affliction, we shoot short of the mark. But by flesh and blood, the scripture elsewhere often means man in this his animal state, as he is in his corruptible, mortal body, as 1 *Cor.* xv. 50. and many other places. And in this sense I speak, when I say, converse not with flesh and blood.—Judge not according to your senses; let not your own sensual appetite determine what is good or evil, sweet or bitter: consult with rectified reason, and not with brutish appetite; confer with faith, and not with fancy. Rectified reason will judge that to be really good which our sensual appetite distastes; an enlightened mind will judge that to make for the interest of the soul, and its eternal happy state, which sense judges hurtful to the interest of the body and its animal state. It is not possible there should be any order, nor consequently any peace or rest in that soul, where the inferior faculties domineer over the superior, and sensitive powers lord it over the intellectual, and where raging appetite and extravagant fancy must clamber up into the throne to determine cases, and right reason must stoop and bow before it.

Be admonished to fly converse with all these, if you would converse rightly, purely, properly, comfortably with God, which is the highest office and attainment of created nature. Consider what I have said concerning this excellent and high employment, and awaken your souls, and all the powers of them, to meet the Lord God, and converse with him aright in the way of his judgments. Converse with God, with God in Christ, with God in his promises, with God in his attributes; and labour to do it, not specu-

Digitized by Google

latively, notionally, but really, practically, according as I have directed in the foregoing discourse. Religion is not an empty, airy, notional thing; it is not a matter of thinking, nor of talking, but it hath a real existence in the soul, and doth as really distinguish, though not specifically, one man from another, as reason distinguishes all men from beasts. Converse with God is set out in scripture by living and walking, and the like. Let me inculcate this thing therefore again, and press it upon you, and I shall finish all. As the way of glorifying God in the world is not by a mere thinking of him, or entertaining some notion of his glory into our heads, but consists in a real participation of his image, in a God-like disposition, and holy conversation, according to that of our Saviour, *John* xv. 8. *Herein is my Father glorified, &c.* so the way of conversing with God in his several attributes is not a thinking often with ourselves, and telling one another that God is just, wise, and merciful, *&c.* though this be good: but it is a drinking in the virtue and value of these divine perfections, a working of them into the soul: and, on the other hand, the soul's rendering of itself up to God in those acts of grace which suit with such attributes, as in water, face answereth face. I do not call the bare performance of duties a conversing with God: prayer and meditation, *&c.* are excellent means, in and by which our soul converses with God; but communion with God is properly somewhat more spiritual, real, powerful, and divine, according as I described it just now. As for example, the soul receives the impressions of divine sovereignty into it, and gives up himself unto God in the grace of self-denial, and humble subjection: the soul receives the communications of divine fulness and perfection, and entertains the same with delight and complacency, and as it were, grows full in it; even as the communications of the virtues of the sun are answered with life, and warmth, and growth in the plants of the earth. So a soul's conversing with the attributes of God is not an empty notion of them, or a dry

Digitized by Google

discourse concerning them, but a receptida of impressions from them, and a reciprocation of them: the effluxes of these from God are such as do beget reflections in man towards God. This is to know Christ, to grow up in him unto all things, according to that in 1 *John* iii. 6. *Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.*

A FAREWELL TO LIFE.

2 Cor. v. 6.

Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.

THE holy apostle having, in the first ver. of this chapter, laid down the doctrine of eternal glory, which shall follow upon this transitory state of believers, shews in the following verses how he himself longed within himself, and groaned after that happy state; and then proceeds to give a double ground of this his confident expectation. The one is in verse 5. where the apostle is confident concerning the putting off of this mortal body, because God had wrought and formed him for this state of glory, and already given him an earnest of it, even his Holy Spirit: the other ground of the confidence and settledness of his mind, as to his desires of a change, is taken from his present state in the body, which was but poor and uncomfortable in comparison of that glorious state held forth in the words of the text. *Therefore we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.* Concerning the apostle's resolvedness, with a quiet and sober mind, to suffer any kind of persecution or affliction whatever; but *we are always confident, i. e.* we do confidence expect, or at least we are always well satisfied, contented, well resolved in our minds, concerning our departure out of this life: for the apostle was speaking, not of afflictions, or persecutions in the former verses, but indeed of death, which he calls a dissolving of the earthly house of this tabernacle, verse, 1. and a being

Digitized by Google

clothed upon with our house which is from heaven, *ver.* 2. 4. Yea, and thus the apostle explains himself, *ver.* 8. where he tells you, what he means by this his confidence, *We are confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body,* where the latter words are exegetical to the former: *q. d.* It is better to be with the Lord than in this mortal body; but we cannot be with the Lord whilst we are in this body, it keeps us from him; therefore we have the confidence to part with it. It is the reason of the apostle's confidence and willingness to part with the body that I am to speak of; and the reason is, because this body keeps him from his Lord.—*Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.* The words are a metaphor, and are to be translated thus, *We indwelling in the body, do dwell out from the Lord;* which our translating renders well, taking little notice of the metaphor, *whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord;* though indeed, if they had left out that word *at home,* it would have been as well, and so have neglect the metaphor altogether, as we may haply hint hereafter. The words are a season of the apostle's willingness to be dissolved, and contain a kind of an accusation of the body, and so seem to lay a blame upon it, and upon this animal life, which must be remembered. Now, for the former phrase of being *at home in the body,* it is easily understood, and generally, I think, agreed upon, to be no more than whilst we carry about with us this corruptible flesh, whilst we live this natural animal life: it only signifies man in his compounded animal state, and doth not at all allude to his sinful, unregenerate, or carnal state: but the latter phrase, *absent from the Lord,* is capable of a double sense, both good and true, and, I think, both fit enough to the context and drift of the apostle. I shall speak to both, but insist most upon the latter.

"Whilst we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord," *i. e.* from the bodily presence of the Lord in heaven, absent from Christ Jesus and his glory; and so the words are the same in sense with 1 *Cor.* xv. 50. *Flesh and*

Digitized by Google

and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God: for by flesh and blood there, must needs be meant man in this animal corruptible state. And so the apostle accuses this kind of life in the body, and as it were blames it for standing between him and his glorified Lord, and so, consequently, between him and the glory of his Lord. And this sense doth well agree with what went before, and with what follows. The apostle hath a great mind to depart, for whilst he is in the body, he is absent from his perfect happiness; for this is the consummation of a christian's happiness, to be with the Lord, to be admitted to a beholding of his infinite glory, as appears by our Saviour's earnest prayer for this, *John* xvii. 24. *Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.* Besides, if we shall see him as he is, we must needs also be made like unto him, 1 *John* iii. 2. else how can we be fit to live for ever in his presence? Now are we kept from this seeing and beholding of the Lord in glory by this animal life; it stands between us and the crown, between us and our Master's joy, between us and the perfect enjoyments of God. To be with the Lord is a state of perfect freedom from sin. No unclean thing shall or can enter into herven, *Rev* xxi. 27. A perfect freedom from all manner of afflictions, *Rev.* xxi. 4. *There shall be no more sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, and all tears shall be wiped away from their eyes.* A state of freedom from all temptations to sin; for a tempting devil and all tempting lusts, shall be cast out for ever: a state of perfect peace, without the least disturbance from within, or from without; of perfect joy, that shall never have end or abatement; and of perfect holiness, when the whole soul shall be enlarged, and raised to know, and love, and enjoy the blessed God, as much as created nature is capable. This is the happy state of seeing God, of being with the Lord; and it is our corruptible body, this animal life, that interposes between us and it; so that the apostle is confident, and rather willing to depart and be with the Lord, than stay here and be without him.

Digitized by Google

2. "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord," without any reference to the world to come; and so it may be fitly translated, *distant from the Lord, estranged from God.* This agrees well with the context, and scope of the apostle also. And thus the words are also a good ground of the apostle's resolution and willingness to die: *q. d.* I am willing to be absent from this body; for whilst I am in it, I find myself to be at a great distance from God. And indeed the word signifies properly to be at a distance, or to be estranged: so I find it interpreted by a learned critic, without any mystery, (as he speaks), of the distance that even believers themselves stand at from God in this life. And in this sense I shall choose to prosecute the words. In which sense the apostle blames this body and animal life, because it keeps us at a distance from God; is a clog, a snare, a fetter, a pinion to the soul. And so the words do agree in sense with those of our Saviour, *Mat.* xxvi. 41. *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak:* where by the flesh must needs be understood the body, if we consider the context, *viz.* the occasion upon which the words were spoken, the sleepiness of the apostles; or if we consider the propriety of speech, according to the style of the New Testament. True indeed, the corruption of nature is sometimes called *flesh*; but according to that way of speaking, our Saviour would rather have said, that the spirit was willing, but the flesh was strong; as he saith elsewhere, that the strong man armed kept the house.

Now, to explain this doctrine a little, That even the godly themselves, whilst they are in this body, are at a distance from the Lord." It must be granted, that the godly soul is nigh unto God, even whilst it sojourns in this mortal body, and tottering flesh. All souls are involved in the apostacy of Adam, and are fallen down from God, have alike straggled from their God, and are sunk into self and the creature: God opened a way for their return by the blood of Jesus; for we owe it unto Christ's death, not only that God is reconciled to us, pardoning our sins, but that any of our

Digitized by Google

natures become reconciled to God, by accepting of him as our God, and loving him as the chiefest Good. Now, there is a double being brought nigh to God by Christ. The first is more general, external, and, as I may say, rational: thus the partition-wall being broken down, the Gentiles that were converted from their idolatry to a profession of God and Christ, and admitted to a communion with the visible church, are, upon that account, said to be brethren to the rest of God's children, 1 *Cor.* v. 11. and as to the church, they are said to be within it, verse 12, though at the same time they were fornicators, covetous, drunkards; and as to God, they are said to be made nigh, *Eph.* ii. 13. A professing of God is said to be a being nigh to him; and even as external performance, is said to be drawing nigh to him; and so Nadab and Abihu, even in the offering of strange fire, are said to have drawn nigh to God, *Lev.* x. 3. And this, though it be a privilege, yet is not that honourable privilege of the truly godly souls, who are by Christ Jesus raised up to God in their hearts, and reconciled to him in their natures, and united to him in their affections, and are so made nigh unto him in a more especial and spiritual manner. Thus all sinful and wicked souls, notwithstanding all their profession and performances, are far from God, estranged from the life of God. Enmity and dissimilitude are the most real distance from God, and truly God-like souls are only nigh unto him; they dwell in him, and he dwelleth in them, as in his most proper temple. As to any kind of opposition, no man can draw nigh to God, nor by any local accession, for so all men are alike nigh to him, who is every-where, and the worst as well as the best of men do live and move in him. But they are really nigh unto God who do enjoy him; and they only enjoy him, whose natures are conformable to him in a way of love, goodness, and God-like perfections. We do not enjoy God by any gross and external conjunction with him, but we enjoy him and are nigh unto him, by an internal union; "when a divine Spirit informeth and acteth our souls, and derives a

Digitized by Google

divine life into them, and through them." And so a godly soul only is really and happily nigh unto God. Thus the apostle Paul, I believe, was as nigh unto God as any man in the world, who did not only live and move in God, as all men do, (though few understand it), but God did even live, and, as it were, breathe in him; the very life that he lived, was *by faith in the Son of God*, Gal. ii. 20. for though he walked in the flesh, yet he did not walk after the flesh, 2 *Cor.* x. 3. And yet this gracious soul, even as all other believers, was at a distance from God; and that not so much by reason of his creatureship, for of that he doth not speak, (so the very angels of God are at an infinite distance from God), but by reason of this mortal body, and animal life, which hindered him from being so nigh to God as his soul was capable to be: *Whilst we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord;* i. e. at a great distance from God.

1*st*. We are distant from God "as to that knowledge which we shall have of him." Philosophical divines speak of a three-fold knowledge, 1. An essential knowledge of God. This is that unspeakable light, whereby the divine Nature comprehends its own essence, wherein God seeth himself. 2. By science. This man is capable of in this life. But this kind of knowing of God by way of science is but a low and dry thing, common to good and bad, men and devils; and is indeed the perfection of the learned more than of the godly: "and this kind of knowledge of God, the glorified soul will reckon but like a fable, or a parable, when it shall be once swallowed up in God, feasting upon Truth itself, and seeing God in the pure rays of his own divinity." 3. Or by intuition. This man cannot attain to in this life, in its perfection, because it arises from a blissful union with God himself, which in this animal state is imperfect. This, in the Platonic phrase, is a contact of God, and, in scripture language, a beholding of God face to face, which we are not capable of in this animal concrete state. So may the answer of God to Moses be understood, when he besought God to shew him his glory, *Exod.* xxxiii. 18. *i. e.* to imprint a distinct idea of his divine essence upon his

Digitized by Google

mind, ver. 20. *No man can see me and live;* i. e. no man in this corruptible state and animal life is capable of seeing me as I am, to apprehend my divine essence, to see my face. The vision of God is not in this life, but in the other; so that a man must die before he can thus know God. This is the exposition of Jewish doctors, and our learned countrymen do approve it also. This blessed knowledge of God we are at a distance from whilst we are in this body: so the apostle declares plainly, 1 *Cor.* xiii. 12. *Now we see darkly, as through a glass;* but the time will come when we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known. Now, our body principally hinders the operation of our minds, when they do exercise themselves about the nature of God, whilst it presents its fancies and gross imaginations to the soul; so it becomes, as it were, a vail upon the face of the soul, draws a cloud, and casts a mist over its eyes, that it cannot discern distinctly, nor judge properly and spiritually.—And, with allusion to this, that passage of the apostle is proper and significant, *We see as through a glass,* "which glass is indeed continually sullied and darkened whilst we look into it, by the breathing of our animal fancies and imaginations upon it." Not only those stinking fogs of pride and self-love, and other sinful corruptions, that do arise out of the soul itself, hinder our right perceptions of God; (as the earth sends out vapours out of itself, which arise and interpose between itself and the sun); but even the animal fancy casts in its phantasms and imaginations as a mist before the eye of the soul, which through divine grace hath been somewhat enlightened, and cleared from its inbred sinful humours. Though corruption in the mind be as a rheum in its eye, so that it cannot well see, yet that doth not hinder but that the fancy, by presenting its unspiritual imaginations, doth also cast a mist before it, that it cannot see well, nor judge rightly; and so it is either held in gross ignorance, or lapses into error. But in the re-generation, this sense either shall not be, or shall be pure and spiritual.

Digitized by Google

2dly. Whilst we are in the body, we are distant from God, "as to that service which we ought to perform to him in the world." And herein it were endless to run through all those outward duties which we owe unto God in the body, and to shew how the body becomes a hinderance either to them, or in them. Though the soul be made willing and forward, by a divine principle implanted in it, yet the body remains a body, a weak and sluggish instrument; and so it will be whilst it is animal, it will go down into the dust a weak body, 1 *Cor.* xv. 43. What man ever had a more willing and cheerful heart than Moses the friend of God? yet his hands were heavy, and ready to hang down, *Exod.* xvii. 12. Shall I instance in the excellent duty of preaching and hearing, wherein the spirits of the most spiritual preacher are soon exhausted, the tongue of the learned is ready to cleave to the roof his mouth, the head is seized with dizziness, the heart with pantings, the organs of speech with weariness, and the knees with trembling? and the ears of the most devout hearers with heaviness, the eyes with sleepiness, and the whole body in a short time with weakness! Shall I instance in the noble duty of prayer, wherein the pious soul goes out to God, but can scarce get its body to accompany it? and there the fancy distracts, the senses divert, and indeed all the members are ready to play the truants, if not the traitors too; especially the brain, where the soul sits enthroned, is suddenly environed with a rude rout of sluggish vapours arising from the stomach, and being no longer able to defend itself against them, falls down dead in the midst of them; insomuch that the poor soul is ready to wish sometimes with the sorrowful prophet, —*Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place, that I might leave my members, and go from them, for they are all an assembly of treacherous servants*; or wish that it were like its Saviour, who could leave his raw disciples asleep, and go and pray apart, and come again unto them! Shall I instance in that high duty of sustaining martyrdom, bearing persecutions for God? Come on, my body cries the

Digitized by Google

holy soul, come on to the stake; come my head, lay down thyself upon this block; come my body, compose thyself in this dark dungeon; come my feet, fit yourselves into these stocks; come my hands, draw on these fetters, these iron bracelets; come, come drink the cup that my Father gives thee. But oh how it follows to the stake! what shaking, shivering, trembling, and reluctancy, may you see in the whole structure of it! the head hangs down, the eyes run over, the lips quiver, the shoulders pull back, the hands tremble, the knees knock together, and the whole fabric is ready to tumble down for fear of falling. Either to this, (as some interpret), or to that duty of prayer, (as others), doth that of our Saviour refer, *Mark* xiv. 38. *The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* It seems the spirit of the weakest christian is strong, though the body (as we have seen) of the strongest saint is weak; though indeed it is not properly the weakness that is in the body that I am to speak to, but the influence that the body hath upon the soul to weaken that; for whilst the soul sympathizes with the body, attends to it, spares it, pities it, itself becomes almost ill-affected to the service of God. I am not so much blaming the body, because it had need, by reason of its slothfulness, to be drawn on to duty, but because, by its influences, it draws on the soul also from them; for so we find it by woful experience, that if the body do sleep, the soul cannot wake, it cannot hear without the ear, nor see without the eyes; so that the body's weariness at length ends in the soul's unwillingness, and the weakness of the one grows to be the sin of the other.

3*dly*. Whilst we are in the body we are at a distance from God, "as to communion with him;" we are estranged from fellowship with him: and this is indeed to be absent from the Lord. Oh! how many weary and uncomfortable days do poor saints live, at a great distance from their God, their life, their happiness, whilst they are in their worldly pilgrimage, in their cage of flesh! Oh! how many days do they forget God, and are apt to think that God hath for-

Digitized by Google

gotten them too! how do they live sometimes, as it were, without God in the world, their souls being surfeited with carnal pleasures, benumbed with fears, frozen with self-love, choaked with cares, stifled with grief, and seem to have no more feeling of God, their life, than a body in the dust hath of the soul its life! Oh! what a heavy yoke doth the poor soul draw under, when it plows and harrows to the flesh, and cannot lift up its head to heaven? Oh! how is our incourse with God obstructed; our beholding of him obscured; our entertaining of him prevented; our enjoyment of him disturbed and violated: our love to him deadened, and his love to us damped; ours rendered, infirm, and his rendered insensible; and all by this make-base mortal flesh! Alas! what uncertainties and vicissitudes, what changings and tossings, turnings and windings, are our poor pilgrim souls here exercised with! what breakings and piercings, reconciliations and fallings out, closing and partings, rising and falling, what ups and downs, what forwards and backwards, doth the poor distressed soul experience in this animal state! The flourishing soul withers, the lofty soul languishes, the vigorous soul faints, the nimble soul flags, the devout soul swoons, the lively soul sickens, and is ready to give up the ghost; and she that was a while ago resting and glorying in the arms of her Lord, anon lies embracing a dunghill, and hath almost forgotten that ever she was happy; her peace is violated, her rest is disturbed, her converse with heaven interrupted, her incomes from God are few and insensible, her out-goings to him are few and lazy, and the rivers of her divine pleasures are almost dried up; and all this whilst she is in this body; and indeed a great part of it by reason of this body in which she is; the animal body keeps us distant from the Lord, that we cannot converse with him, mind him, enjoy him, live upon him and unto him. The body being fitted only for this animal state, is ever drawing down the soul, when it would raise up itself in contemplation of, and communion with the blessed God. And so,

Digitized by Google

1. The necessities of the body hinder the soul's communion with the Lord. Not that the necessities of the body are simply in themselves to be blamed, but the caring for these doth so exercise the soul in this state, that it cannot attend upon God without distraction, Oh? how much doth the necessary caring for meat and drink, food and physic, yea, the ordering of temporal affairs, estrange from communion and converse with God! so that the soul, like poor Martha, is cumbered with many cares, and busied with much serving in this house, and cannot attend so devoutly and entirely as it ought upon the Lord. If the body be pinched with pain, the soul cannot be at rest, but must needs look out for relief; if the body be pinched with hunger and thirst, the soul can take no rest till it have found out a supply, for it; if the one be sick the other is sad; if the one be hungry or thirsty, the other seems to languish; like Hippocrates his twins, that laughed and cried, lived and died together.

It is a wonderful mystery, and a rare secret, how the soul comes to sympathize with the body, and to have not only a knowledge, but, as it were, a feeling of its necessities; how these come to be conveyed to the soul, and how it comes to be thus affected with them. But we find it so; and indeed, to speak truth, it seems necessary for the maintaining of this animal state that it should be so, that the soul should be, as it were, hungry, weary, sick, and sleep too together with the body. "For if our soul should not know what it is to be hungry, thirsty, cold, or sick, or weary, but by a bare ratiocination, or a dry syllogistical inference, without any more especial feeling of these necessities, it would soon suffer the body to languish and decay, and commit it wholly to all changes and casualties; neither would our own body be any more to us than the body of a plant or of a star, which we do many times view with as much clearness, and contemplate with as much contentment, as we do our own." But in the mean time the soul is diverted from its main employment, and turned aside from its communion with God; not so much by providing some-

Digitized by Google

what for our bodies to eat, and drink, and put on, which is lawful and needful, as our Saviour implies, *Mat.* vi. 32. as by sinking itself into the body, being passionately and inordinately affected with its wants, and so being sinfully thoughtful, as our Saviour intimates in the same chapter, vers. 31.

2. The passions of the body hinder the soul's communion with the Lord. So powerful is the interest and influence that this body hath in and over the soul, that it fills it with desires, pleasures, griefs, joys, fears, angers, and sundry passions. The body calls out the soul to attend upon its several passions, which I dare not say are sinful in themselves, as they first affect our souls, no more than it is our sin that we are men; our blessed Saviour seems not to have been free from them, as grief, *Is.* liii. 3. fear, *Heb.* v. 7. who yet was free from all sin, 1 *Pet.* ii. 22. Nay, it seems necessary, as I said before, considering the nature of this animal life, that the soul should have the corporeal passions and impressions feelingly and powerfully conveyed to it, without which it could not express a due benevolence to the body that belongs to it: and indeed, were it not so, we could not properly be said, in the apostle's phrase here, to be at home in the body; the soul would rather dwell *in domo aliena quam sua.* But the soul being called out to attend upon these passions, is easily ensnared by them; for it can hardly exercise itself about them, but it slips insensibly into a sinful inordinacy. As for example, "The animal spirits, nimbly playing in the brain, and swiftly flying from thence through the nerves up and down the whole body, do raise the fancy with mirth and cheerfulness, which we must not presently mistake for the power of grace, nor condemn for the working of corruption: so also when the gall empties its bitter juice into the liver, and that mingles itself with the blood there, it begets fiery spirits, which presently fly up into the brain, and cause impressions of anger." Now, though I dare not say that the soul's first sensating and entertaining of these passions is sinful, yet it is sadly evident that our souls being once moved by these undisciplined ani-

Digitized by Google

mal spirits, are very apt to sit upon and cherish those passions of grief, fear, mirth, anger, and, as it were, to work them into itself, in an inordinate manner, and contrary to the dictates of reason; and so the will presently makes those sinful, which before were but merely human, or as one calls them, the mere blossomings or shootings forth of animal life within us. We see then, in these particulars that not only the depraved dispositions of the soul do keep us at a distance from God, but even this body also is a great hinderance to that knowledge of God which we shall attain to, that service of God which we might perform, and that sweet communion with him which we shall enjoy. It is a clog to the soul that would run, a mist to the soul that would see clearly a manacle to the soul that would work, a snare to the soul that would be free, a fetter to chain it to earthly and material things, and as it were a pinion to the wings of contemplation. More particularly, it is a hinderance to it, as to these three things which I have named: as to the soul's knowledge of God, the body is an occasion of ignorance and error; as to its serving of God, an occasion of distraction and weariness, lightness and triflingness; and, as to its communion with God, an occasion of earthliness and sensuality.

Now, this distance which this body keeps the soul at from God, might more particularly appear in another way of explication, by observing the especial grievances that arise to the soul from those three great animal faculties, (if I may so speak), the senses, the appetite, the fancy.

1. The senses; I mean the external senses of the body, seeing, hearing, *&c.* These convey passions to the soul, upon which it insists and feeds with a sinful fondness and eagerness. Set open the eye, and it will set hard to convey some species to the soul of the earthly objects, that shall justle the ideas of God out of it. Set open the ear, and it will fill the soul with such a noise of earthly tumult, that the secret whispers of the Divine Spirit cannot be heard.—The like I may say of the rest. Oh! how easily do these

Digitized by Google

discompose the fixed soul, distract the devout soul, cast a mist before the contemplative soul, and hale down the raised soul from communion with heaven, to converse with earthly objects! *Ut vidi ut perii!* is the complaint of many a christian, as well as it was of the heathen. The souls of most men are quite sunk into their senses, and do nothing but, as it were, lacquey to them all their lives; and so the servants are on horseback, and princes go on foot.—Though the eye will never be satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing, yet forsooth these importunate suitors must be gratified; the eye must see what it will see, and the ear must hear what it will hear: nothing must be withheld from them, that these childish senses do whine after.—These men's souls are indeed incarnate, swallowed up in their eyes, ears, and mouths. But not only these, but even godly souls are often charmed and ensnared by their senses; even they converse not only in the body, but too much with it also, and it becomes as a Delilah to lull them asleep, and bind them too. Good Job found his senses so treacherous, that he was fain to make a covenant with them, *Job* xxxi. 1. and well if he would scape so too. The words are a metaphor; for indeed the worst of it is, that these senses are not capable of any discipline, one cannot bring them into any covenant-terms; so that whilst we have senses, they will be treacherous; whilst our eyes are in our heads, they will be wandering after forbidden objects.

2. The appetite, the sensitive appetite; which is a faculty of the sensitive soul, whereby this animal man is stirred up to desire and lust after the things which his senses have dictated to him. This bodily lust following upon the neck of the former, becomes a greater snare to the soul: this restless suitor comes whining ever and anon to the soul for every trifle that the eye hath seen, or the ear heard, or the mouth hath tasted, and by its continual coming, and importunate crying, wearies her into an observance of it: as the fond child comes crying to the mother for every knack and gaw that it hath seen upon the stalls, and she,

Digitized by Google

though she cannot in judgment approve of the request, yet either in fond indulgence, or for peace sake, will condescend to purchase it. This is the daughter of the horse-leach, that cries continually, Give, give. Why, what would it have? even any thing that it hath seen, or heard, or touched, or tasted, any thing that it sees a fellow-creature to be possessed of: and so indeed the appetite doth not only ensnare the soul unto drunkenness and gluttony, but voluptuousness, lasciviousness, and all manner of sensuality. The evil of the sensual appetite appears in wontonness and lasciviousness, (whether real, verbal, or mental), in immoderate and inordinate trading, ingrossing, sporting, building, attiring, sleeping, visiting, as well as in eating and drinking. I will determine nothing concerning the first motions of the appetite, whereby it solicits the will to fulfil it; only this, that if it solicit to any thing simply and morally evil, it is sinful in that first act, and that at all times it ought carefully to be watched, lest it seduce to intemperance in things lawful. But concerning the gratifying of the appetite, seeing there must be in us a sensitive appetite, whilst we are in this animal state, it is to be endeavoured, as far as may be, that we gratify the appetite, not as it is a sensitive appetite, but under this notion, as the thing that it desires makes for our real good, and tends to the enjoyment of the supreme Good: to eat and drink, not because we are hungry or thirsty, because the appetite desires it, but with reference to the main end with respect to the hightest good, that the body may be enabled, strengthened, and quickened, to wait upon the soul cheerfully, in the actions of a holy life. But this man in his animal state cannot perfectly attain to, which shews that the appetite doth keep us at a distance from God.

(3.) The fancy; this also keeps man at a distance from God, and hinders us in the knowledge and service of God, and interrupts the soul's communion with God. This is a busy and petulant faculty, or inward sense, and the soul doth readily sensate the passions of it, so that it doth frequently hinder its mental operations, and becomes a great snare.

Digitized by Google

A working fancy, how much soever it is magnified by the wisdom of this world, is a mighty snare to the soul, except it work in a fellowship with right reason, and a sanctified heart. I am persuaded there is no greater burden in the world to a serious soul, especially in hot and dry constitutions, where it is commonly most pregnant, and most impatient of discipline; and, I confess, I have often wondered at the soul's readiness to be so speedily affected with the phantasms and imaginations of it, and fondness to hug them so dearly. This indeed, if it be so far refined, as to present sober and solid imaginations to the mind, and to act in subserviency to sanctified reason, is an excellent handmaid to the soul in many of her functions; but otherwise is a snare, as we have partly observed already, and may observe more, if we study the secrets of our own souls, and the mighty mysteries that are within us. And this doth not only ordinarily disturb, distract, and hinder in ordinary duties, but even when the soul is at the highest pitch of communion and contemplation, it essays to pull it down to attend to its vain phantasms, and indeed gives it many a grievous fall. I doubt not to affirm, that this is the most pernicious enemy of the three that I named, to the soul's happiness, as might appear in many respects; I will only name one. It hath an advantage against us, which neither of the other two hath: it infests us and annoys us sleeping as well as waking. In sleep the senses are locked up, and the appetite is, for the most part, silent from its begging; but then the fancy is as busy and tumultuous as ever forming and gathering imaginations, and those are commonly wild and senseless, if not worse. The mind, in way of kindness and benevolence to the body, suspends its own actions, whilst the body takes its rest in the night, and then the rude fancy takes its opportunity to wander at liberty, as being without its keeper, and acts to the disturbance of the body: but that is not the worst; for it becomes so tumultuous and impetuous sometimes, as that it awakens the mind to attend upon its imaginations; and this the soul doth condescend to in an

Digitized by Google

inordinate manner, and sets the stamp of sinfulness upon them, to its own wounding. And now that I am speaking of sleep as a Mantissa to this discourse, I cannot but observe how this very thing also keep, us at a distance from God in this animal state. How is our communion with God interrupted by this! for herein we cease not only from the actions of an animal life, but commonly from the actions of a spiritual life too. What a great breach, what a sad intercision is there made in our converse with God by this means! Such a poor happiness it is that we have in this world that it is cut off, and seems, as it were, not to be one fourth part of our time; for indeed a happiness that is not felt, deserves not the name of happiness. Some learned and active men have been ashamed that they have slept away so much of their time, which was all too little for their studies and exploits. Ah, poor christian! that, as it were, sleeps away so much of his God, being as much estranged from him in the night, as though he had never conversed with him in the day, and in the morning when he awakes, cannot always find him with him neither, which is enough to make a poor saint wish, either that he might have no need of sleep, or that with the amorous spouse, *Song* v. 2. though he sleep, his heart might wake perpetually.

We have seen in what sense this mortal body keeps believers absent from the Lord, and in what respects it keeps them at a distance from God, even in this life, from the knowledge of God, the service of God, and communion with him. Here then, by way of application,

1. We may see that it was for good reason the blessed apostle is confident and willing to depart; nay, he groans within himself, desiring that *mortality might be swallowed up of life*, as he speaks, *vers.* 4. I told you before, that these words did contain the reason or ground thereof; and by this time I hope you see that the reason is good, and the ground is sufficient. What! will the men of this world say, will you persuade us out of our life? should any thing in the world make a man weary of his life? *Præstat miserum esse*

Digitized by Google

quam non esse. The apostle was sure besides himself, or he would never have fallen out with his own life; or else he was in a passion, and knew not what he said; or else his life was bitter to him by reason of the poor, afflicted, persecuted condition that he lived in, and so he was become desperate, and cared not what became of him. No, none of these: the apostle was in his right wits, and in a sober mind too. It was not a passion, or a fit of melancholy, but his judgment and choice upon good deliberation; and therefore you find him in the same mind elsewhere, *Phil.* i. 23. *I desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.* Besides, he gives a reason for what he desires; but we know that passion is unruly and unreasonable. Neither was the apostle besides himself, for he gives a good, solid, and wise reason—*Whilst we are at home in the body, &c.* he will part with his life rather than not be perfectly happy. For, whereas worldings put such a high price upon life, and think that nothing should persuade men out of their lives; (it is true indeed, if we speak properly, life is the perfection of the creature, the happiness of every thing is its life; *A living dog is better than a dead lion,* Eccl. ix. 4.) but I may say to these, even as our Saviour said to the woman in *John* iv. 18. concerning her husband, the life that we live here is not our life. The union of the sensitive soul with the body is indeed, truly and properly the life of a beast, and its greatest happiness, for it is capable of no higher perfection: but the union of the rational soul with God is the noblest perfection of man, and his highest life: so that the life of a believing soul is not destroyed at death, but perfected. Neither was the apostle weary of his life because of the adversities of it. The apostle was of a braver spirit, sure, than any Stoic; he durst live, though he rather desired to die. All the conflicts he endured with the world never wrung such a sigh from him, as the conflict he had with his own corruptions did, *Rom.* vii. 24. *O wretched man, &c.* All the persecutions in the world never made him groan so much as the burden of his flesh doth here, and his great dis-

Digitized by Google

tance from the Lord. A godly soul can converse with persecuting men, and a tempting devil, can handle briers and thorns, can grapple with any kind of oppressions and adversities in the flesh, without despondency, so long as it finds itself in the bosom of God, and in the arms of omnipotence; but when it begins to consider where it is, how far it is from its God, its life, and the happy state that God hath prepared it for, then it cannot but groan within itself, and be ready, with Peter, to cast itself out of the ship to get to its God, to land itself in eternity. Neither indeed, to speak truly, is it only the sense of sin against God, which sets the godly soul a-going: for though it must be confest that this is a heavy burden upon the soul, yet the apostle makes no complaint of this here, but only of his distance from God that necessary distance from God, that the body kept him at.

2. See here the excellent spirit of true religion. Godly souls do groan after an unbodied state, not only because of their sins in the body, but even because of the necessary distance at which the body keeps them from God. We may suppose a godly soul, at some time, to have no manner of affliction in the world to grieve him, no sin unpardoned, unrepented of, to trouble him; yet for all this he is not at perfect rest; he is burdened, and groans within himself, because he is at such a distance from that absolute Good, whom he longs to know more familiarly, and enjoy more fully than he doth yet, or than is allowed to mortal men: and though nothing else ail him, yet the consideration of this distance makes him cry out, Oh! *when shall I come and appear before God!* be wholly swallowed up in him, see him as he is, and converse with him face to face. Bare innocency, or freedom from sin, cannot satisfy that noble and large spirit that is in a truly God-like soul; but that spirit of true goodness, being nothing else but an efflux from God himself, carries the soul out after a more intimate union with that Being from whence it came. God dwelling in the soul, doth, by a secret mighty power, draw the soul more and more to himself. In a word, a godly soul that is really touched with the sense of divine

Digitized by Google

sweetness and fulness, and impressed with divine goodness and holiness, as the wax is with the stamp of the seal, could not be content to dwell for ever in this kind of animal body, nor take up an eternal rest in this imperfect mixed state, though it could converse with the world without a sinful sullying of itself, but must needs endeavour still a closer conjunction with God; and, leaving the chace of all other objects, pant and breathe not only after God alone, but after more and more of him; and not only when it is under the sense of sin, but most of all when it is under the most powerful influences of divine grace and love, cry out with Paul, *Oh, who will deliver me out of this body!*

3. Suffer me from hence to expostulate a little, to expostulate with christian souls about their unseemly temper. Doth this animal life and mortal body keep us at such a distance from our God, our happiness? Why are we then so fond of this life and mixed state? Why do we so pamper this body? Why so anxiously studious to keep it up, so dreadfully afraid of the ruins of it? If we take the apostle's words in the first sense that I named, then I may ask with him in the first verse, *Know we not, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?* or ver. 8. Why are we not willing rather to be *absent from the body*, and to be *present with the Lord?* If we take them in the latter sense, as this animal body is an hinderance to the soul's knowledge of, and communion with God, then I ask concerning this, as the apostle doth concerning rich men, *James* ii. 6. Why do ye pamper, prize, honour, doat upon this body? Doth not this body oppress you, distract you, burden you, clog you, hinder you? doth not this body interpose between the Sun of righteousness, between the Father of lights, and your souls, that should shine with a light and glory borrowed from him; even as the dark body of the earth interposes between the sun and moon to eclipse its light? why are we not rather weary that we are in the body? Surely there are some objections, some

Digitized by Google

impediments to the soul's longing after its happy state, which I shall come to anon; but I doubt also, that there is something that chains the soul to this animal life, some cords in this earthly tabernacle that tie up the soul in it; but I cannot well imagine what they should be. Say not, there is something of God to be enjoyed in this life, which makes it pleasant; for, although this be true, yet I am sure God gives nothing of himself to a soul thereby to clog it, or cloy it. Did Moses send for some clusters of the land of Canaan into the wilderness, think ye, that the people might see and taste the fruits, and sit still, and be satisfied, and say, Oh, it is enough, we see that there are pleasant things in that land, we will never come at it? or did he not rather do it that they might make the more haste to possess themselves of it? Will any man say, Away, I will have no more land, no more money, I have some already? Can a godly soul say, God hath given me an earnest, I desire no more? No, no; but the report that a christian hears of a rest remaining, a happy life remaining for it, and the chariots of divine graces that he sees God hath sent out into his soul to convey it thither, make him cry out, not with Jacob, *Gen.* xlv. 28. *It is enough, Joseph my son is yet alive, &c.* but, Oh! this is not enough, this report is not enough: it is not enough that I taste some of the good things of the land; it is not enough that I see these carriages sent for me; it is not enough that my soul hath an happy and honourable life prepared for it; I see it indeed before I die, but I will also die that I may see it better, and enjoy it more. But I doubt there is some earthly tie, even upon the heavenly soul, that chains it to this animal body; but sure I am, that whatsoever it is, it is but a weak one. Is there any worldly accommodation, any creature-toy, that should in reason step between a soul and its God? Is this life sweet, because there are creature-comforts to be enjoyed? and will it not be a better life, when creature-comforts shall not be needed? and are the pleasures of this body, the comforts of this life, the flattering smiles, the fawning embraces of the creature,

Digitized by Google

such a mighty contentment to a soul, to a soul acquainted with the highest Good? Hast thou, O my soul, any such full and satisfying entertainment in thy pilgrimage, as to make thee loth to go home? wilt thou hide thyself with Saul among the stuff, among the lumber of the world, when thou art sought for to be crowned? are the empty sounds of popular applause, the breaking bubbles of secular greatness, the shallow streams of sensual pleasures, the smiling dalliance, and lisping eloquence of wives and children, the flying shadows of creature-refreshments, the momentary flourishes of worldly beauty and bravery, are these meat for a soul? are these the proper object, or the main happiness of such a divine thing as an immortal soul? Why are we not rather weary of this body, that makes us so weary of heavenly employment? why do we not rather long to part with that life that parts us from our life? and instead of the young apostle, *It is good to be here*, cry out with the sweet singer, *Oh that one would give me the wings of a dove, that I might fly away and be at rest.*

And now, methinks, by this time I might be somewhat bold, and form my remaining discourse into an exhortation. But it may be you will not bear it all at once; therefore I will first begin with a dehortation, to dissuade from two evils concerning your body, *viz.* fear and fondness.

1. Take heed of fear for the body. I speak not so much of those first impressions which our fancies and animal spirits do make upon our minds, though it were to be wished that the mind did not so much as once sensate or entertain these; but of those acts of the will, whereby it doth receive, allow, cherish these impressions, until the cockatrice egg be hatched into a viper. I speak not against care and circumspection, no; nor against that kind of suspicion whereby wise and prudent persons are jealous of circumstances and events, and so do watch to prevent, remove, or manage bodily evils, which is called *fear*; though even in these there may be an extreme, a *fear where no fear is*; Ps. liii. 5. which is there ascribed to the wicked, and

Digitized by Google

elsewhere threatened as a judgment, *Lev.* xxvi. 36. *The sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; Deut.* xxviii. 65. *The Lord shall give thee a trembling heart,* &c. *Prov.* xxii. 3. *A prudent man forseeth the evil, and hideth himself;* but there are also many fools who hide themselves though they see no evil. But I am not speaking of these; there is a vast difference between care and fear. By fear, I mean that trembling, fluctuating, tormenting passion, that doth not suffer the heart to be at rest, but doth, as it were, unhinge it, and loose the joints of the soul, whether it breaks out into expression or no; it clouds the understanding, unsettles the will, disorders the affections, confounds the memory, and is like an earthquake in the soul, taking it off from its own basis, destroying the consistency of it, and hurling all the faculties into confusion; this, whether it break out into any unseemly acts or not, which commonly it doth, is itself an unseemly temper for a wise man, much more for a godly. I might speak as a philosopher, and shew how unbecoming a man, and how destructive to him this passion is: so much, that whilst it doth predominate, it almost robs him of that which is his greatest glory, even reason itself. But, to say no worse of it, it is very opposite, if not contrary, to that noble grace of faith, whereby the steady soul rests and lodges in the arms of God, as in its centre. But, to speak to the thing in hand, what an unseemly passion is this? we would have the world to believe that we have laid up our happiness in God, and that we are troubled that we are so far from him; and yet we are afraid lest that should be taken out of the way that keeps us at a distance from him: we flatter ourselves that we are in haste for heaven, and yet we are dreadfully afraid lest our rubs should be taken out of the way. How do these things hang together? Are we persuaded, that if this earthly house of our tabernacle were taken down, we have a building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens? if not, why do we yet call ourselves christians? But, I think, I may take it for granted we are all so persuaded; and if

Digitized by Google

so, why are we so afraid it should be taken down? I am loth to speak what I think; yet methinks the entire and ardent love which we either do bear, or ought to bear, to the blessed God, and union and communion with him, should cast out his fear. This is suitable to scripture, 1 *John* iv. 18. I will not dispute how far sinful fear for the body may carry a godly soul; the further the worse, I am sure: but if any will needs be so indulgent to his own passions, and so much an enemy to his own peace, as to encourage himself to fear, which is a strange thing, from the example of Abraham denying his wife, or Peter denying his Lord, let him compare the issue, and then let me see whether he dare go and do likewise: but if that will not fright you from fear, chew upon these two considerations.

(1.) I pray you seriously dispute the matter with yourselves, how far fear of sickness and death may consist with that ardent thirst after union and perfect communion with the blessed God, with which we ought to be possessed.

(2.) Dispute seriously how far it can stand with the sincerity of a christian. God hath not left us in the dark as to this matter. I will turn you to a text or two, which, methinks, should strike cold to all slavish, trembling professors, *Prov.* xxviii. 1. *Job* xv. 20, 21. *The wicked travaileth with pain all his days, a dreadful sound in his ears.* They are the words of Eliphaz indeed, but they do agree with the words of God himself, *Is.* xxxiii. 14. *The sinners in Zion are afraid, fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites.* When I read over these texts, I cannot but pray, and cry, O my soul, come not thou into the number of the wicked, and be not united into the assembly of hypocrites!

2. Take heed of fondness of the body; of a double act of it, priding, pampering.

(1.) Take heed you pride not yourselves in any excellencies of the body. Doth this mortal body keep us at a distance from our God? do we well then to love that which keeps us from that which is most lovely? why do we stand fondly gazing upon that which keeps us from the blessed

Digitized by Google

sight of God? If you ask me, Did ever any man hate his own flesh? I will ask you again, Did ever any wise man love his flesh above him that made it? did ever any godly soul love his body in opposition to his God? Oh, but it is a comely body! And what is a beautiful body but a fair prison? A silver twist, or a clog of gold, do as really hinder the flight of a bird, and forestal her liberty, as a stone tied at her heels. Nay, those very excellencies which you so much admire, are so much the greater hinderances. If we had learned that excellent lesson indeed, of enjoying all things only in God, then the several beauties and braveries of the body would be a help to our devotion, they would carry us up to an admiration and contemplation of that glorious and most excellent Being from whom they were communicated: so we might, in some sense, look into a glass, and behold the beauty of God. But, alas! these commonly prove the greater snares: many had been more beautiful within, had they been less beautiful without; more chaste, if less comely; many had been more peaceable, and more at peace too, if they had been less able to have quarrelled and fought. It was said of Galba, who was an ingenuous man, but deformed, that his soul dwelt ill; but sure I am, it might better have been so said of beautiful Absalom, or Jezabel, whose bodies became a snare to their souls. On the other hand they that want a beauty in their bodies, will perhaps labour to find an excellency in their minds far beyond it; as the philosopher advised to look often into a glass, *ut si deformis sis, corrigas formositate morum*, &c.

(2.) Take heed of pampering the body, of treating it too gently or delicately. Deny it nothing that may fit it for the service of God, and your own souls, and allow it no more than may do that. Thy pampering is, 1. Unseemly: What! make a darling of that which keeps us from our Lord; carry it gently, and delicately, and tenderly towards that, which whilst we carry about with us we cannot be happy! 2. Injurious: If you bring up this servant deli-

Digitized by Google

cately from a child, you shall have him become your son at length, yea, your master. If you do by your bodies, as the fond king did by his son Adonijah, 1 *Kings* i. 6. never displease it, never reprove it, never deny it, it will do with you in time as he did, raise seditions in your soul. Go on, and please, and pamper, and cocker your bodies, and it will come to this at length, that you must deny them nothing; you must give whatsoever a whining appetite will crave, go whither your gadding senses will carry you, and speak whatsoever wanton fancy will suggest. Doth not the body itself set us at a sufficient distance from God, but we must estrange ourselves more from him, by pleasuring it, spend the time that should be for God in decking, trimming, and adorning it! when you cram this, you feed a bird that will pick out your eyes; you nourish a traitor when you gratify this Adonijah. In a word, it is not enough that we do all carry fire in our bosoms, but we must also blow it up into a flame? *Nay, my brethren, do not so foolishly.*

And now, methinks, by this time, I may venture upon an exhortation, by degrees at least.

1*st*. "Watch against the body." You have heard how the senses, appetite, and fancy, become a snare to the soul's living unto, and conversing with God. Now then, if you seriously design communion with heaven, if you place your happiness in the knowledge and enjoyment of that supreme and eternal Good, it becomes you to watch against all things that may distract or divert you from it, or make you fall short of the glory of God. Men that live upon earthly designs, whose great ambition it is to be great in the world, do not only use the most effectual means, and take the most direct courses to accomplish those designs, and attain those ends, but do continually suspect, and diligently watch against all the moths that would corrupt, the rust that would consume, the thieves that would plunder their treasures; and, in a word, against all possible hinderances, defraudations, and disappointments: so will we

Digitized by Google

suspect and watch, sure, against all enemies and traitors to our souls, if we live here upon eternal designs, if our ambition be to be great in God alone. And the more eminent the danger is, the more will we watch. Have you not found by experience, which of these three have been most prejudicial to your communion with God? if not, you have not been so studious to know the state, nor pursue the happiness of your own souls as you might; if so, then watch against that most of all which you have found to be most injurious. For it ordinarily comes to pass, either by the difference of constitutions, or difference of temptations, or different ways of living, or some other thing, that God's children are more ensnared by some one of these than another. Well, be sure to watch and pray, and strive more especially against the more especial enemies of your souls.

2dly. "Live above the body;" above bodily enjoyments, ornaments, and excellencies. Though these bodily enjoyments be never so sweet, these bodily ornaments never so glorious, yet is not your happiness in these. Certainly they live to their loss, who live upon the excellencies of their own souls, whether natural or supernatural; they deprive themselves of the infinite glory, fulness, and sufficiency that is in the blessed God, who take up their happiness in these: much more do they pinch and impoverish their own souls who live upon bodily ornaments or excellencies, wherein many inferior creatures do excel them; the rose in beauty, the sun in brightness, the lion in strength, the stag in swiftness, &c. If a woman were as lovely as the morning, *fair as the moon, clear as the sun*; if a man were full of personal grace and majesty, *terrible as an army with banners*; yet were not their happiness in these accomplishments. Nay, which is worse, these ornaments stand between us and our happiness. When you begin therefore at any time fondly to admire any of these bodily excellencies, then think with yourselves, Oh, but all these do not make my soul happy! Nay, this beautiful outside must stink, and be deformed; these fair and flourishing members must

Digitized by Google

wither in the dust; this active, strong, and graceful body, must be buried in disgrace and weakness, before I can attain to an entire and perfect happiness. This consideration will advance us to live above the body.

3*dly*, " Be content to be unbodied for a time," It is true, that we can no otherwise be happy, no otherwise be present with God, know him familiarly, enjoy him perfectly and entirely? cannot we get to him, except we go through the dust? Be it so then; be content to be unbodied for a time. *Occidat modo imperet*, could the heathen say concerning her son; much rather may a christian say concerning his Father, Let him slay me, so my soul may but reign with him, which is by his reigning in it; let him kill me, so he will but fill me; let him draw me through the dust of the earth, so he will but draw me out of this dust of the world, so he will but draw me nigh unto himself, and bring me into a full and inseparable conjunction with my Lord! Methinks I need not use many arguments to persuade a soul that is feelingly overpowered, mastered, ravished with the infinite beauty, goodness, glory, and fulness of his God, to be willing to quit a dusty tabernacle for a time, wherein it is almost swallowed up, to depart, and to be entirely swallowed up, in him. Nay, suppose a christian in the lowest form, who hath but chosen God for highest good and only happiness, as every sincere christian hath, methinks, he should have learned this lesson, to comply with that infinite, perfect will, that governs both himand the whole world. I cannot conceive a godly soul without the subduing of self-will, nor suppose a sincere saint void at least of the habit of self-resignation. Therefore I will add no more concerning this, but rise a step higher.

4*thly*, " Long after an unbodied state," desire to depart, and to be with the Lord; groan within yourselves to have mortality swallowed up of life, in which temper you find the holy apostle. To be content to die, is a good temper; a temper scarce to be found, I think, in any wicked man; not from a right principle, I am sure: but, methinks, it is

Digitized by Google

no very great thing, in comparison of what we should labour to attain to. Think on a little; what a strange kind of cold uncouth phrase it is, Such a man is content to be happy! Men are not said to be content to be rich, but covetous; not willing to be honoured, but ambitious; and why should ye only be content to be with God? I am pursuaded there is no shew nor semblance of satisfactory bliss and happiness for a soul, a noble immortal nature, but only in the supreme, essential, perfect, absolute Good, the blessed and eternal God: and should not this noble active being be carried out with vehement longings after its proper and full happiness, as well as this earthly sluggish body it carried with restless appetite after health, safety, and liberty? Why should a soul alone be content to be happy, when all other things in the world do so ardently court, and vehemently pursue their respective ends and several perfections? Certainly, if the blessed and glorious God should display himself in all his beauty, and open all his infinite treasures of goodness, and sweetness, and fulness, within the view of soul, it could not but be ravished with the object, earnestly press into his presence, *ruere in amplexus*, and, with a holy impatience, throw itself into his arms; there would be no need of setting bounds to the mount, to keep it from breaking through unto the Lord. What is said of the queen of the South, when she had heard the wisdom, and seen the glory of Solomon, *2 Chron.* ix. 4. would be more true of a christian, there would be no more spirit left in him. Some have therefore observed the wisdom of God, in engaging the soul in so near an union with the body, that it might care for it, and not quit it: yea, the heathen observed the wisdom of God, in concealing the happy state of a separated soul, that so men might be content to live out their time, *Victurosqui Dii celant, ut vivere durent, fœlix esse mori.* But, alas! we see but darkly as through a grass, and our affections towards God are proportionable to our apprehensions of him; these are dark, and therefore those are dull. And oh! would to God they were but indeed proportionable! for

Digitized by Google

then we should love him only, if not earnestly; and desire him entirely, if not sufficiently. Consider what I have hinted concerning the happiness of the soul in the enjoyment of God, and what I have more fully demonstrated concerning the body's hindering of it, and keeping it at a distance, and then argue, Is happiness the main end of every being? must not this soul, then, being of a noble and immortal nature, needs look out for some high and noble happiness, suitable to its excellent self? can that be any where but in the enjoyment of the highest and uncreated Good? and can this never attain whilst we are in this animal state? Oh! why then do we not look out after so much enjoyment of this blessed God as we are now capable of, and long after a departure hence, that we may enjoy him freely and fully, and be eternally happy in him? Oh! be not only content, but even covetous.

But what! shall the soul break the cage, that she may take her flight? God forbid! how can he pretend to be a lover of God, who is not formed into his will, subject to his ordidation, content to abide in the station that he hath allotted him? But if we may not break it to escape, yet, methinks, it may be safe enough, with submission, to wish it were broken; if we may not, with Saul, dissolve ourselves, yet, with Paul, we may desire to be dissolved. The perfection that the most christians attain to, is but to desire to live, and be content to die. Oh! consider what I have said in this matter, and invert the order of those words in your hearts, Be content to live, desire to die.

But what! would you have us pray for death? Answer: I speak not of a formal praying either for one or other. What the apostle speaks of the greatest of sins, 1 *John* v. 16. I am ready to say of this state of freedom from all sin, *I do not say that ye should pray for it.* You will tell me, that David and Hezekiah prayed for life; and I can tell you that Elijah prayed for death, 1 *Kings* xix. 4. he was indeed a man subject to passions, *James* v. 17. but I believe was none of them. But I will not inveigle myself

Digitized by Google

in any controversy: methinks the sad consideration laid before your eyes, Whilst we are in the body, we are absent, distant from the Lord, should wring out an *O wretched man that I am, &c.* or an *I desire to be disolved;* or if not words, yet at least a groan after immortality, with our apostle here,—*We groan within ourselves that mortality may be swallowed up of life.*

But can a soul possibly long for the destruction of the body? Philosophy indeed tells us that it cannot. Be it so; yet I am sure divinity teaches, that a soul may long after the redemption of the body, the redemption of it from this kind of animal, corruptible, ensnaring condition that it is now in, *Rom.* viii. 23.—*We groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of our body.* If we cannot wish to be unclothed, yet we may long to be clothed upon, *vers.* 4. of this chapter; at least, methinks, the heathen should not outdo us, who could say, *Mori nolo, sed me mortuum esse nihil curo.*

But, will all cry, Oh! if we were sure of an interest in Christ, of pardon of sin, of truth of grace, of eternal life, then we could freely leave all.

Ans. 1. That is, you would live to be more holy before you die: you are not yet holy enough, no, nor never shall be till you die. If you long after holiness, long to be with God, for that is a state of perfect holiness. To desire to live, upon pretence of being more holy, is a mere fallacy, a contradiction. But, it may be, this is not the meaning of the objection: therefore,

2. A not having of what we would have, is not an excuse for not doing what we should do. It is our duty to rejoice in the Lord, *Phil.* iv. 4. which our not having of assurance doth not exempt us from; though, if we have assurance, we might indeed rejoice the more. But, to take off this plea at once,

3. Our earnest longings after a full and perfect enjoyment of God, and so our breathings after an immortal state, do not depend upon our assurance, but indeed assurance,

Digitized by Google

rat her depends upon that. I doubt we are commonly mistaken in the nature of assurance, and, it may be, are in a wrong manner curious about the signs of Christ's appearing in our souls; for certainly a well-grounded assurance of the love of God doth most discover and unfold itself in the growth of true godliness in the soul. Now, the love of God, and an earnest desire to be like unto him, and to be with him, is the better half of all religion, *Matt.* xxii. 37, 38. so that it rather seems, that assurance springs up from this frame of soul, than that this arises out of assurance. If assurance be the thing that you desire, get your souls joined to God in an union of affections, will, and ends, and then labour and long to be closer to him, liker to him, perfectly holy and happy in him, and be assured that Christ is in you of a truth: for these mighty works which he hath wrought, these divine breathings, these holy pantings after him, do bear witness of him.

4. Whether ever you come to that feeling knowledge, that powerful sense of your state, or no, which you call assurance, yet know that it is your duty to long after immortality. We are wont to call assurance the privilege of some few but the scripture makes this temper that I am speaking of the duty of all believers; which I do the rather name, because I find few professors of this temper, and indeed but few that are willing to believe that they ought to be. Our Saviour calls all believers to as much in effect as I do. *Luke* xxi. 28. *Look up, and lift up your heads, for the day of your redemption draweth nigh:* whereby is not meant a bare posture and speculation, but joy, and longing are required by that phrase, say the Dutch annot. See also *Rev.* xxii. 17. Consider further, (which, methinks, should strike cold to the hearts of cold-hearted professors), that this very temper is made one of the greatest characters of true and sincere saints: I do not know of any one oftener named: see *Rom.* viii. 23. *We groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of our body.*—2 *Tim.* iv. 8. *The Lord shall give the crown to them that love his appearing.*—*Tit.* ii. 13.

Digitized by Google

we should live godly in this present world, *looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*—2 *Pet* iii. 11, 12. *What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God?—Jude* verse. 21. *Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.* Do all these plain and pathetical scriptures stand for cyphers in your eye? methinks they should not. But not to stand upon the proof of it to be a duty, it matters not whether there be an express command for it or no: this that I am speaking of is not so much the duty of godly persons, as the very nature, genious, and spirit indeed of godliness itself. Methinks a godly soul, that is truly touched with divine Goodness, influenced by it, and impressed with it, as the needle is with the loadstone, must needs strive powerfully, within itself, to be in conjunction with it: a holy soul, that, after all its wearisome defeats, and shameful disappointments in the creature, finds itself perfectly matched with this infinite, full, and perfect object, must certainly and necessarily be carried, without any other argument, with fervent longings after union to it, and communion with it. The spouse might say concerning Christ, as he concerning her, *Song* vi. 12. *Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib:* and every godly soul may, in some degree, say with that spouse, *Cant.* v. 4. 5. *My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him: I rose up, &c.* Tell me, friends, how can divine grace, that well of living water in the soul, choose but spring up into eternal life? *John* iv. 14. I doubt not to affirm, that that which is of God in the soul must needs carry the soul after God; as it belongs to heaven, so it will be longing towards heaven. That which is of a divine original, must needs have a divine tendency; that which is of divine extraction, and will have in it a divine attraction, and pursue a divine perfection, *Col.* iii. 1. That divine life and spirit that runs through

Digitized by Google

them completely blessed. Holiness, and purity of heart, godly souls, doth awaken and exalt, in some measure, all the powers of them into an active and cheerful sympathy with that absolute Good that renders will be attracting God more and more to itself; and the more pure our souls are, and the more separate from earthly things, the more earnestly will they endeavour the nearest union that may be with God: and so, by consequence, methinks they must needs, in some sense, desire the removal of that animal life, and dark body that stands in their way; for they know that that which now letteth, will let, (such is the unchangeable nature of it), till it be laid in the dust, till it be taken out of the way. The thirsty king did but cry for water of the well of Bethlehem, and his champions broke through the host of the Philistines and fetched it, 2 *Sam.* xxiii. 15. and will ye not allow the thirsty soul, if not to break through to fetch it, yet at least to break out into an *Oh that one would give me to drink* of the living water of the fountain of grace, and peace, and love? will ye allow hunger to break down stonewalls; and will ye neither allow the hungry soul to break down these mud walls, nor to wish within itself that they were broken down? In a word, then, give me leave earnestly to press you to an earnessing after perfect fruition of, and eternal converse with God; and to change the apostle's word, *Heb.* xii. 1. Seeing we are compassed about with so great a divine light, and glory, and brightness, let us be willing and desirous to lay aside this weight of flesh, and this body, that so easily resists us with sins and snares, and run with eagerness to the object that is set before us. Amen, Amen.

Digitized by Google

THE ANGELICAL LIFE.

MATT. xxii. 30.

——Are as the Angels of God in Heaven.

THE doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the great things of the Christian Religion, as they were accounted strange things by all the world, when they were first published and preached, so indeed by none less entertained, or rather more opposed, than by the wisest of men living in that age, *viz*, Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, who were the *disputers of this world*, as the apostle's phrase is, 1 *Cor.* i. 20. a thing of wonderful observation, not only to us in our day, but even to our blessed Lord himself in the days of his flesh, who fetches the cause of it from heaven, and adores the infinite wisdom of God in it, *Matt.* xi. 25. Amongst other set disputations that the Sadducees held with our Saviour, this in this chapter is very famous; where they dispute against the resurrection of the dead, by an argument fetched *ab absurdo*, ver. 25. grounded upon an instance of a woman that had been married to seven husbands successively. Now, say they, if there be a resurrection, whose wife shall she be then? Our Saviour answers by destroying the ground of their argument, and shewing that they disputed upon a false supposition; for, saith he, *In the resurrection there shall be no marrying; but men shall be as the angels of God.* In which words this doctrine is plainly laid down, (for I shall not meddle with the controversy),

Digitized by Google

"That the glorified saints shall be as the angels of God in heaven." The other evangelists lay down the same truth, see *Mark* xii. 25. *Luke* xx. 36. In the exalication of which point I will shew, I. Negatively, wherein the saints shall not be like the angels. II. Affirmatively, wherein they shall be like unto them, or, as St. Luke hath it, equal to them.

I. Negatively. 1. "The glorified saints shall not be like the angels in essence." The angelical essence, and the rational soul are, and shall be different. Souls shall remain souls still, keep their own essence: the essence shall not be changed; souls shall not be changed into angelical essences.

2. "They shall not be wholly spirits without bodies," as the angels. The spirits of just men now made perfect, are more like to the angels in this sense than they shall be after the resurrection; for now they are spirits without bodies, but the saints shall have bodies, (not such as now, so corruptible, so crazy), not in any thing defective, not needing creature-supplies, but incorruptible, glorious bodies, in some sense spiritual bodies; which are described by three characters, 1 *Cor.* xv. 42, 43. incorruptible, (somewhat more than immortal), glorious, powerful.—Neither doth their having bodies any whit abate of their perfection or glory, nor render them inferior to the angels; for even the glorious Redeemer of the world hath a body, who is yet superior to the angels; and he shall change the vile bodies of the saints, and make them like unto his glorious body, *Phil.* iii. *ult.*

3. "Neither have we any ground to believe that the saints shall be altogether equal to the saints in dignity and glory:" but rather, that as man was at first made a little lower than the angels, so that he shall never come to be exalted altogether so high as they; for it seems, that the natural capacity of an angel is greater than of a man, and so shall continue, for they are a distinct kind of creatures.—As a beast cannot become so wise and intelligent as a man, for then he would cease to be a beast; so neither can a man

Digitized by Google

become so large and capable as an angel, for then he would cease to be a man.

II. Affirmatively. The glorified saints shall be like the angels of God in heaven, 1*st*, In their qualities; that is,

1. "In being pure and holy." Whether they shall be equal to them in positive holiness or no, I know not; whether they shall understand, and know, and love God, in all degrees, as much as the angels; it seems rather that they shall not, because, as I said before, their capacity shall not be so large. But if in this they be not altogether equal to the angels, yet it implies no imperfection; for they shall be positively holy, as far as their nature is capable, and so shall be perfect in their kind, *Heb.* xii. 23. *The spirits of just men made perfect:* they shall in this be like unto the angels, if not equal to them, yea, like unto God himself in it; *Be ye holy, as I am holy,* 1 Pet. i. 16. Matt. v. *ult.* But as to negarive holiness, the saints shall be even equal to the angels of God in heaven, *i. e.* they shall have more sin, no more corruption than they have; they shall be as perfectly freed from all iniquities, imperfections, and infirmities, as the angels. What can be clearer than that which hath no uncleanness at all in it? Why, so clean shall all the saints be, *Rev.* xxi. 27. *No unclean thing shall enter into heaven.* They shall be without all kind of spot or blemish, *Eph.* v. 27. which is a perfect negative holiness; more cannot be said of the angels in this respect. As branches of this:

2. "As the holy angels do reverence the divine Majesty, *Is.* vi. 2, 3. *They cover their faces with their wings, crying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, so shall the glorified saints.* You may see what sweet harmony they make, consenting together to give the glory of all to God, *Rev.* vii. 9—11, 12. The saints stood and cried, *Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb;* the angels stood round about, saying, *Amen, Amen.*

3. "In their readiness to do the will of God, and execute his commands;" therefore the angels are described to

Digitized by Google

have wings, *Is.* vi. 2. *With twain they did fly.* How God shall please to employ angels or saints in the world to come, is not for us to enquire; but they shall be alike ready to do his will, and serve his pleasure, whatever it shall be. Even whilst the saints are imperfect on earth, they can cry, *Here am I, send me*, Is. vi. 8. how much more ready shall they be then, when all their fetters are knocked off!

4. They shall be as the angels, "in their cheerful and unwearied execution of the will of God." So the angels are, and so shall the saints be. The spirit shall be then more willing, and the flesh shall be no more weak, as it is now; for when it is raised again, it shall be in power, 1 *Cor.* xv. 43. More things of this nature might be added, but I pass lightly over them; because, although they be true, yet they are not principally looked at in this text: therefore I come to the second thing wherein the glorified saints shall be like unto the angels, and that is,

In their way of living. They shall be like the angels, *i. e.* saith one truly, living like the angels. How is that? our Saviour tells us, neither marrying, nor being given in marriage; it is added presently in *Luke* xx. 36. *For neither can they die any more.* If there be no dying, there will be no need of propagation; if no need of propagation, then why should they marry? The angels are single, and know no other conjunction but with God in a spiritual manner; no more shall the saints. But what great matter is that to be like the angels in? what perfection is that? Many saints, yea, and sinners too upon earth, are so like the angels, nay, the devils too. Therefore you must know that our Saviour under this phrase of not marrying, &c. doth comprehend all manner of creature-converse, all kind of living upon, and delighting in the creature by a synecdoche of the part, as is ordinary in scripture; *I have not given upon usury, saith the prophet, yet the people curse me*, Jer. xv. 10. *i. e.* I have had no dealing in the world, no negociation. By one kind he understands the whole, *Ezek.* xxv. 41. where, by eating their fruits, and drinking their milk,

Digitized by Google

is understood the possessing of all that was theirs; and in many other places the Spirit of God uses this tropical way of speaking.

The angels of God neither marry, nor are given in marriage, *i. e.* they live not upon any created comfort, but live entirely upon God, converse with him, are everlastingly beholding his glory, and delighting themselves in him.—Thus shall the glorified saints live for ever: their bodies shall not need nor use created supplies, food, physic, raiment, *&c.* which things in this animal state they stand in need of, *Matt.* vi. 32. But that is not all: for their souls shall not any longer desire, nor hanker after any created thing, but, as the angels, shall be possessed of God, filled with the fulness of God; all the powers and faculties of them perfectly refined and spiritualized, abstracted from all created things, eternally rejoicing and delighting themselves in the contemplation and participation of the supreme and infinite Good: for during this earthly and imperfect state, not only the bodies of good men feed upon, and are sustained by the creatures, in common with other men, but even their souls do taste too much of worldly contentments, and drink too deep of earthly pleasures and creature-comforts: even the most refined souls upon earth, though they do not properly feed upon any thing below God, yet do oft dip the end of their rod in this honey that lies upon the earth, (with Jonathan), do cast an unchaste eye upon their earthly enjoyments, and delight in them in a way too gross and unspiritual, having abstracted them from God, and loving them with a distinct love. But in the resurrection it shall not be so; for the holy souls shall be perfectly conformed to the holy God, shall feed upon him singly, live upon him entirely, be wrapped up in him wholly, and be satisfied with him solely and everlastingly, and so shall they be equal to the angels. The creature, although it does not fill any truly sanctified soul upon earth, yet it hath some room there; but then it shall be perfectly cast out, and the soul shall be filled with all the fulness of God. The crea-

Digitized by Google

ture is now much in some godly souls, and something in all of them; but then it shall be nothing at all to them, or in them, but God shall be all in all, all things in all of them; as the way of the saints living, and their glorified state is described, 1 *Cor.* xv. 28. *that God may be all in all. They shall inherit all things;* but how is that? why, see the explication of it in the following words, *He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God,* Rev. xxi. 7. God will be their God; God shall be unto them instead of all things. In that state there shall be no need of sun or moon, *Rev.* xxi. 23. by which excellent and useful creatures the whole creation seems to be understood; for they that shall live above the sun and moon, shall certainly live above all things that are below these: but how then? why it follows, *The glory of God shall enlighten them, and the Lamb shall be their light:* so *Rev.* xxii. 5. *And there shall be no night there. and they need no candle, neither light of the sun: for the Lord giveth them light.* All happiness is derived into them from God, and therefore there shall be no night, no want of any creature-comfort to them; neither shall they desire any thing more of the creature, whether small or great whether candle or sun. For explication of this their blessed life, let me allude to that of our Saviour. *Luke* xii. 24. *The fowls of heaven neither sow nor reap, yet God feedeth them;* so the saints in heaven neither want nor desire any created good, for they feed upon God the supreme and infinite Good: and again *ver.* 27. *The lillies neither toil nor spin, and yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.* These blessed souls have no respect at all to things terrene and created; yet they are so filled and adorned with the glory of the infinite Majesty, that Solomon in all his glory was a filthy and ragged thing in comparison of them. In a word, the state of the glorified saints and angels is set out by our Saviour in the same manner, by one and the same description, and that is the seeing of God; the life of angels is called a continual beholding of the face of God, *Matt.* xviii. 10. and the state of the saints glory

Digitized by Google

and happiness is also a seeing of God, *Matt.* v. 8. *Heb.* xii. 14. *Rev.* xxii. 4. *They shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads.* Now, this phrase, the seeing of God, applieth both to the saints and angels, doth place their happiness in God alone, excluding the creature; and it doth import the fulness and clearness, and certainty of that their bliss.

Thus I have shewed you, in what sense, though I am not able to shew you in what degree, the glorified saints shall be like the angels of God in heaven: their way of living, *viz.* upon the blessed God alone, shall be the same with that of the holy angels.

APPLICATION.

From the discovery of the future state of the saints, I find myself filled with indignation.

1. Reproof against the carnal conceits that many christians have of heaven. Christians do I call them! nay, herein they seem rather Mahometans, who place heaven in the full and lasting enjoyment of all creature-comforts, nay, indeed of sinful and abominable pleasures, as one may read in their Alcoran. It may be, few christians, are altogether so sensual; but, sure I am, the far greater sort of christians, so called, are very gross and carnal, at least, very low in their conceits of the state of future happiness. Heaven is a word as little understood as holiness; and that I am sure, is the greatest mystery in the world. It would be tedious to run through the particular various apprehensions of men in this matter, and indeed impossible to know them. The common sort of people understand by heaven either just nothing but a glorious name, or at best but a freeness from bodily torment: as nothing of hell affects them but that dreadful word *fire*, so nothing of heaven but the comfortable word *rest* or *safety*. Others, it may be, think there is some

Digitized by Google

thing positive in heaven, and they dream of an honourable, easy, pleasant life, free from such kind of toils, labours, pains, persecutions, reproaches, penuries, which men are subject to in this life; this is a true notion, but much below the nature of that happy state. Others are yet more highly affected with the words of glory and glorious, and seem to be much ravished with them, but are like men in a maze or wonderment, who admire something that they understand not, and are altogether confounded in their own apprehensions of it; as if a man should be mightily taken with such a fine name as Arabia the Happy, and by a blind fervour of mind should desire to go and visit it. Others rise yet higher in their apprehensions of heaven, and look upon it as a holy state, but that holiness is negative, *viz.* a perfect freedom from sin, and all temptations to it: and indeed this is a precious consideration, and that wherein many a weary soul finds much rest: but yet this amounts not to the life of angels; it is a lower consideration, of heaven than what our Saviour here presents us with. The state of the glorified saints shall not only be a state of freedom from temporal pains, or eternal pains, or a freedom from spiritual pains and imperfections, but a state of perfect positive holiness, pure light, ardent love, spiritual liberty, holy delights; when all created good shall perfectly vanish, all created love shall be swallowed up, the soul shall become of a most God-like disposition, shining forth in the glory that he shall put upon it, glorying in nothing but the blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in his divine image and perfections, and wrapt up entirely into his infinite fulness to all eternity: which hath made me oft-times to nauseate, and indeed to blame the poor low descriptions of the kingdom of heaven which I have found in books and sermons, for too dry, yea, and gross; which do describe heaven principally as a place, and give it such circumstances of beauty, firmness, security, light, and splendor, pleasant society, good neighbourhood, as they think will most commend an earthly habitation. True indeed, the Holy Ghost

Digitized by Google

in scripture is pleased to condescend so far to our weak capacities, as to describe that glorious state to us by such things as we do best understand, and are apt to be most taken with, and do most gratify our senses in this world; as a kingdom, paradise, a glorious city, a crown, an inheritance, &c. but yet it is not the will of God that his enlightened people should rest in such low notions of eternal life; for in other places God speaks of the state of glory according to the nature and excellency of it, and not according to the weakness of our understanding, and describes it at another rate, calling it the life of angels, as here; the beholding of God, *Matth.* v. 8. a coming unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, *Eph.* iv. 13. God's being all things in us, 1 *Cor.* xv. 28. it is called a knowing of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ, *John* xvii. 3. In a word, which is as high as can be spoke, higher indeed than can be perfectly understood, it is called a being like unto God, 1 *John* iii. 21. *We shall be like unto him.* But this use is not so much for reproof, as it is for information.

2. Here is matter of reproof, yea, and of just indignation, against the gross, low, sensual, earthly life of professors, who yet hope to be the children of the resurrection, and to be as the angels of God in heaven. What! hope to be like them then, and yet altogether unlike them now! I speak not in a passion, but out of a just indignation that I have conceived against myself, and against the generality even of saints themselves. I am not going to speak of covetousness commonly so called; there is a sin much like to it, which is not indeed a single sin, but an evil and unseemly temper, which is earthly mindedness, or minding of earthly things; or if you will, because I would not be misunderstood, a living upon the creature, or a loving of the creature with a distinct love. Oh! the insensible secrecy, and insuperable power of this creature love! I cannot sufficiently exclaim against it. Why do we spend noble affections upon such low and empty nothings? Are we called with such a high calling, think you, that one consideration

Digitized by Google

should be so low? Is the fulness of the fountain yours, and do ye yet delight to sit down by and bathe yourselves in the shallow streams? Is your life hid with Christ in God? why then do you converse as if your life were bound up in the creature? Have you laid up your treasure in the blessed God? what do your hearts then so far from it? Is your happiness in heaven? why then is not your conversation there too? Do ye count it your bliss to see God? what then mean those fond and wanton glances that ye cast upon created comforts, and that unchaste love which you bestow on things below? I mean not only the *bleatings of the sheep and the lowings of the oxen*, I speak not of the grosser sort of earthly-mindedness, sensuality, or covetousness, but of that more refined and hidden creature-love, a loving of friends, relations, health, liberty, life, and that not in God, but with a love distinct from that love wherewith we love God. To love all these in God, and for his sake, and as flowing from him, and partaking of him, and with the same love wherewith we love God himself, is allowed us; but to love them with a particular love, as things distinct from God, to delight in them merely as creatures, and to follow them as if some good, or happiness, or pleasure, were to be found in them, distinct from what is in God, this is a branch of spiritual adultery, I had almost said idolatry. To taste a sweetness in the creature, and to see a beauty and goodness in it, is our duty; but then, it must be the sweetness of God in it, and the goodness of God which we ought alone to taste and see in it. As we say, *Uxor splendet radiis mariti*, the wife shines with the rays of her husband; so more truly every creature shines but by a borrowed light, and commends unto us the goodness, and sweetness, and fulness of the blessed Creator. You have heard that the glorified souls shall live upon God alone entirely, wholly, eternally; and should not the less glorious souls, I mean gracious souls, do so too, in some degree? yea, even we who are upon earth, and do yet use creatures, should behold all the scattered beams of goodness, sweetness, per-

Digitized by Google

fection, that are in these creatures, all united and gathered up in God, and so feeding upon them only in God, and upon God in all of them. It is the character of wicked and godless men, that they set up and drive a trade for themselves; live in a way distinct from God, as though they had no dependence upon him; they love the world with a predominant love; they enjoy creature-comforts in a gross unspiritual manner; they dwell upon the dark side of their mercies; they treasure up riches, not only in their chests, but in their hearts: they feed upon the creature, not only with their bodies, but their very souls do feed upon them; and thus, in a word, they *live without God in the world.*— All this is no wonder; for that which is of the earth must needs be earthly, *John* iii. 31. but is it not a monstrous thing, that a heavenly soul should feed upon earthly trash? I speak without any hyperbole; the famous king of Babylon, forsaking the society of men, and hearding himself with the beasts of the earth, and eating grass with the oxen, was not so absurd a thing, nor half so monstrous or unseemly, as the children of the most high God forsaking the true bread of souls, and feeding upon the low fare of carnal men, even created sweetness, worldly goods: nay, a glorious star falling from its own sphere, and choaking itself in the dust, would not be such an eminent piece of baseness; for what is said of the true God in one sense, *John* iii. 31. is true of the truly godly in this sense, *that cometh from heaven is above all, i. e.* above all things that are below God himself.

3. Shall this life of angels be also the life of saints? this may then serve as a powerful consideration to mortify in us the love of this animal life, to make us weary of this low kind of living, and quicken us to long after so blessed a change. Well might the apostle say indeed, that to die was gain, *Phil.* i. 21. for is not this gain, to exchange an animal for an angelical life? a life which is in some sense common to the very beasts with us, for that which in some sense may be called the life of God? For as the blessed and holy God lives upon his own infinite and self-sufficient

Digitized by Google

fulness, without being beholden to any thing without himself, so shall the saints live upon him, and upon the self-same infinite fulness, and shall not need any creature-contributions. The apostle indeed saith, that *the last enemy to be destroyed is death*, 1 Cor. xv. 26. which is true of enemies without us; and it is true with respect to Christ, who shall make a general resurrection from the dead, for that is the proper meaning of it; but it is true also, that the last enemy to be overcome within us is the love of life, therefore it is said, that a man will part with any thing to keep his life, *Job* ii. 4. and we do generally excuse the matter, and cry, Oh! life is sweet, life is precious. It must be confessed, and it may be granted; I believe that there is an inclination of the soul to the body, arising from that dear and unconceivable union that God himself hath made which is purely natural, some say altogether necessary for the maintaining of man in this complex state, and not in itself sinful: possibly there may not be found a man upon earth so holy and mortified, in whom this is not found; certainly it is the last hinderance to be removed out of the way of our perfect happiness. This although in itself natural, yea necessary, and without blame; yet in the inordinateness of it, ordinarily, if not constantly, becomes sinful. I count him the most perfect man in the world, who loves not his own life with an inordinate sinful love; who loves it only in God, and not with a creature-love distinct from God. There are two ways whereby this natural and lawful love of life becomes sinful, viz. immoderateness and inordinateness: immoderateness is when men love their lives at that rate, that they are filled with unreasonable and distracting fears, cares, and thoughts about them, when the whole business of life is almost nothing else but a studiousness to preserve the being of life. Inordinateness is, when men, though they do not love their lives at that excessive rate, yet do love life as a creature-good, not in God, nor in order to him, but love it for itself, as something out of God. Every carnal man in the world is guilty of

Digitized by Google

the latter, and I doubt but few saints altogether free from the guilt of it. Now, that this immoderate love of life ought to be subdued in christians, all men almost will grant: if any will not grant it, we can easily prove it from the command of God, *Matt.* vi. 25. *Take no thought for your life.* 1 *John* ii. 15. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.* Both which words, in the most favourable interpretation that can be given of them, do in the judgment of all, forbid immoderation? nay, a mere philosopher would enforce this from mere moral considerations, which I cannot now stand upon. But this inordinate love of life, as it is a more secret sticking evil, a more refined corruption, is harder to be discovered, and men are loth to be convinced of the evil of it. Now, this particular distinct loving of life, not as in God, but in itself, as a creature-good is clearly condemned in that first and great commandment, *Matt.* xxii. 37. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.* q. d. God the supreme, infinite, perfect, original, essential, self-sufficient Good, is to be loved in the highest, and purest, and strongest manner, that the heart of man is capable to love; and all other things only in him, and under him, and as being of him, and for his sake. Let it be allowed that life is good; yet it must be added, that it is but a created good: let it be allowed that life is comfortable; yet it must be acknowledged, that man's chiefest comfort and happiness doth not stand in this animal life. So then, life itself is to be loved in God, who is the fountain and spring of life; it is to be loved in the quality of a created good, and no otherwise. Now, created goods are to be loved only in the Creator, as coming from him, as partaking of him, as leading to him. Argue the case a little thus: The soul of man is allowed to love its body with which the great God hath matched it, and to love union with this body, which union we call *life*; but this body being a creature, and a creature much inferior to itself, and much more ignoble than itself, cannot in reason be judged to be the fit and

Digitized by Google

adequate object of its strongest and best affections: that must needs be something more excellent than itself; and that cannot be any thing in this world; (for this world hath nothing so noble, so excellent in it as the soul of man); it must indeed be the Creator himself. Well, seeing God is the supreme, self-sufficient, perfect Good, he is to be loved with all the strength and powers of the soul, singly and entirely: and the will of God being God himself, is not only be submitted to, or rested in, but to be chosen and loved above all created things, yea, even above life itself, the best of creatures. So then, if it be the will of God to call for our lives, we ought readily to give them up; because we ought to love the will of God much more than our lives. I pray you drink in that notion, *viz.* that the will of God being pure, holy, and perfect, should not only be submitted to, or rested in, but even loved and chosen above all creatures. Now, the will of God is not that only whereby he teaches men, and prescribes laws to them, but that whereby he rules and governs the world, and disposes of men in any condition of life, or takes away their lives from them. The eternal Fountain of goodness can send forth nothing but what is perfectly good; and that which is perfectly good ought to be loved with an universal, pure, and, as far as possible, perfect love. This you will say, perhaps, is a high and hard saying; but let it not seem impossible for a man to love his own life only in God, and in subordination to him; for this God requires, and he requires not things impossible, *Luke* xiv. 26. *If any man come after me, and hate not his own life, he cannot be my disciple; i. e.* not simply hate it, but in comparison of me and my will. It is not then impossible, nay, you see it is a necessary duty, without which we cannot be Christ's disciples. The saints of old found it possible. Holy Paul gives this answer readily. *Acts* xxi. 13. *I am ready to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus;* and *Acts* xx. 24. *I count my life dear unto me, so that I might finish my course with joy.* It is witnessed of the whole army of the saints, in *Rev.* xii.

Digitized by Google

1. that *They loved not their lives unto the death*, i. e. they did not value them in respect of God and his truth.—Neither let any one flatter himself, and say, Yea, if I were called to die for God, I would rather do it than deny him; for the will of God is as much to be eyed in his sending for us by a natural death as by martyrdom, and a not giving up our lives to him at any time, is as truly to deny him and his will, as not to give them up at the stake when we are called to it. Besides, how shall we imagine that he that is unwilling to die in his bed should be willing to die at a stake? Now, this duty of being mortified to the love of this animal life, being so difficult, yet so necessary, and so noble, how doth it become every saint to study to attain to this perfection? which, that we may, let us press upon ourselves this consideration, this doctrine, that the glorified saints shall live as angels of God in heaven. We know that if this body were broken down, this low life out off, we should live like angels, not being beholden any more to poor creatures for help or comfort, but should be filled with the fulness of God, filled with his image and glory, and live upon him entirely for evermore. Yea, I may add, that this very living above our own lives merely at the will of God, is a participation of the angelical life even in this world; therefore labour to be mortified to that love of this life which is here upon earth, yea, to be weary of it, yea, almost ashamed of it.

4. Shall we thus live the lives of the angels, subsisting in God, feasting upon him, filled with him to all eternity? this may moderate our sorrow which we conceive for the loss of any created good, houses, lands, husband, wife, children, &c. yet a little while and we shall not miss them, shall not need them, shall not desire them any more. The blessed angels live a glorious life, and they have none of these, but are perfectly satisfied in the enjoyment of God alone: they have no wives nor children, yet they want none; and yet a little while, and we shall have none neither, neither shall we want them, having all things in

Digitized by Google

the God of all things: they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are in conjunction with the Father, with love, and goodness, and truth itself; and so they have no want of any thing. If you have no candles left in the house, yet it is towards day-break, and the sun will rise upon you, and you shall need none, and yet have light enough too. In a word, learn to live beside them whilst you have them, and you will be the better able to live without them when they are removed.

5. I come now to the fifth and last use that I shall make of this doctrine; and oh that you and I may make this happy use of it! Shall the saints be as the angels of God in their way of living upon God, and enjoying all happiness in him alone for ever? shall this certainly be our life in heaven? oh; then, labour to begin this life upon earth. If you cannot perfectly transcribe, yet, at least, imitate that angelical kind of life. Though you are here imprisoned in a body of earth, and oft cumbered and clogged with bodily infirmities, called to tend upon bodily necessities, as far as this animal state will permit, live upon God. Do not excuse nor vindicate that low kind of earthly life, do not justify your living below and besides God, but stir up yourselves to behold where your happiness lies, and live not willingly below it. Certainly a godly soul hath more than bare hope in this world: God the blessed, infinite, and communicative Good, hath not locked himself so far out of sight, but that he gives his people a comfortable beholding of him even whilst they are in their pilgrimage; and what Solomon saith of the life of the godly, he means it of their present life, *Prov.* xv. 24. *The way of life is above to the wise:* their living not only shall be, but is now above; it is a high way of living. They are certainly a puny sort of mechanical christians, that think and talk only of a heaven to come, and dream of an happiness without them, and distinct from them. The truly godly and God-like soul cannot so content himself, but being spirited and principled from above, is carried out after the infinite and almighty Good,

Digitized by Google

as a thing is carried towards its centre; and hastens into his embraces as the iron hastens to the loadstone, and longs to be in conjunction with it. If therefore ye be from heaven, live above all, above all earthly things. *If ye be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above,* Col. iii. 1. If ye be born of God, live upon God, and suck not the breasts of a stranger. Deny self, live besides self, *i. e.* live not to your lusts, live not to the service of your senses, to the lust of the flesh, to the lust of the eye, to the pride of life; let not your souls be servants to your sins, no, nor to your senses; that were for servants to ride on horseback, and princes to walk on foot, *Eccel.* x. 7. Live above self, *i. e.* let your souls quit all their own interest in themselves, and entirely resign themselves to God, as to all points of duty and service. But that is not all; neither is that it which I press you to, from these words; but live above the creature, and whatsoever is in it, *viz.* delighting in God, conversing and communing with him alone as the chiefest Good; desire not any creature any further than as it may help you forward to the Creator; neither delight in it any further than as it either represents some of the divine perfections, witnesses something of divine love, or leads to some divine participation or communion. Seeing we shall come to live upon God, and delight in God alone, without any creature, let us now live upon, feed upon, love God alone in every creature. Now, to give you a more distinct knowledge of this high and noble life, I will explain it in some particulars, negatively and affirmatively.

1. Negatively. 1*st*. "Live not upon self." I speak not of living unto self, but live not upon self, self-excellencies, self-sufficiencies, any created accomplishments, which was the life of the Stoics, those great philosophers, who placed happiness in the enjoyment of themselves. To enjoy one's self, indeed, is a high duty, a noble privilege, a duty of the gospel, *Luke* xxi. 19. *Possess ye your souls.* But how must we enjoy ourselves? why, only in God. He enjoys himself,

Digitized by Google

1. Not who, in a sullen melancholy, retires to a solitary and monastical life, as many of the sowrer sort of papists do.

2. Nor he who, in a proud mood, disdains the perfections of God shining forth in other men; and hiding himself from them through envy, contents himself to sit and admire his own personal accomplishments, as many humourists do.

3. Nor he who finding nothing without him, nor knowing nothing above him to give his soul her full rest, settles upon a foundation of his own, and admires a self-sufficiency in the temper of his own spirit, a little subdued by philosophical precepts, as the Stoics did, and our Quakers do. But he who enjoys himself in God, *i. e.* who doth not view himself in the narrow point of his own being, but, taking a view of himself in the unbounded essence of God, loves, and enjoys, and values himself, and all his personal excellencies as he is in God, and partakes of his perfections. To live in a way of self-converse is below the end of man's creation, who was made for a higher good; and hereby a man shall never obtain true happiness, for it is peculiar to God alone to be happy in himself. "In a word, a soul that confines itself to itself, and lives, and moves, and rejoices only within the narrow cell of its own particular being, deprives itself of that almighty and original Goodness, and Glory that fills the world, and shines through the whole creation."

2dly. "Live not upon any creature without yourselves." Self indeed is a creature; but yet for clearness in proceeding we shall distinguish them. Now, this is the life of the greatest sort of men, they live beside God, and move only within the sphere of the creature. You will easily understand that I speak not of the body's living upon the creature, for so God hath appointed that it shall live; and yet as to this too, I say with our Saviour, *Man liveth not by bread alone, &c.* but I speak of the soul of man living upon the creature as its highest good, and feeding

Digitized by Google

upon it as its best fare: they rise up early, and sit up late, and God is not in all their thoughts: they are filled with domestic and foreign comforts, but behold not the Father of lights from whom all these descend: they live upon the good things of the world, yet live without God in the world. Now, by these men,

1. I do not mean those Heathens that in the most idolatrous manner do, in the literal sense, set up the creatures for gods.

2. Nor those christians that in a most gross manner do make idols of the creatures, and place their happiness in them.

3. No, nor only those earthly professors, who follow the world too eagerly, and have such a deep and rooted respect for it, that they can be ordinarily content to suffer creature-employments to jostle God and duties out of their hearts and houses, whose worldliness is apparently too hard for their religion. Who then? shall we come any nearer? yes:

4. Those are guilty of creature-converse who do not enjoy all creatures in God; who love any thing in any creature with a distinct love, who do not love it only in God; who love silver, gold, houses, lands, trading, friends, with a particular pinching love. Oh take heed of this creature-love, of valuing any created thing any otherwise than in God, any otherwise than as being from God, partaking of him, and leading to him.

3*dly*. "Live not upon ordinances." These are God's institutions, love them, cleave unto them, attend upon them, let no temptation cause you to leave them; but live not upon them, place not your religion, place not your hope, your happiness in them, but love them only in God; attend upon them, yet not so much upon them, as upon God in them; lie by the pool, but wait for the angel; love not, no not a divine ordinance for its own sake. Why, who doth so? alas! who almost doth not?

1. Thus did they in Ezek. xxxiii. 32. who delighted

Digitized by Google

in the prophet's eloquence, and in the rhetoric of his sermons, as much as in a well-tuned voice and harmonious music: and so do thousands in England, who read the Bible for the style, or story's sake, and love to sit under learned and elegant discourses, more for accomplishment than for conversion: and swarms of priests, who preach themselves more than Christ Jesus, even in his own ordinances; as a proud boy rides a horse into the market, to set forth himself more than his master's goods.

2. But there are many not so gross as these, who do yet use ordinances in a way very gross and unspiritual, placing their devotion in them, and sinking their religion into a settled course of hearing or praying; who will wait upon God, as they call it, at some set and solemn times, new moons, and sabbaths, it may be evening and morning; but religion must not be too busy with them, nor intermeddle in their ordinary affairs, or worldly employments; it hath no place there; they do not count it a garment for every day's wear.

3. And not only these, but even almost all men are too apt to seek rest in duties and ordinances, or, at least, to be pretty well satisfied with the work done, whether they have conversed with God there or no. Oh, if you love your souls, seek your happiness higher! Conversing with divine ordinances, I confess, is honourable and amiable, but it is too low a life for an immortal soul.

II. Affirmatively. Let nothing satisfy you but God himself; take up with no pleasure, no treasure, no portion, no paradise, nay, no heaven, no happiness, below the infinite, supreme, and self-sufficient Good. Let your eye be upon him, and his all-filling fulness; let your desire be unto him, and to the remembrance of his name; follow hard after to know the Lord, and to enjoy the Father through his Son Jesus Christ; let your fellowship be with the Father, and with the Son, by the Spirit, 1 *John* i. 3. *O love the Lord all ye his saints, Ps.* xxxi. 23. yea, *love him with all your soul, and with all your strength, Matt.* xxii. 37. yea, *and keep*

Digitized by Google

yourselves always in the love of God; persevere and increase in the love of God; Keep yourselves in the love of God, Jud. ver. 21. Oh sweet duty! Oh amiable pleasant task! Oh! sweeet and grateful command! Away, ye crowd of creatures, I must keep my heart for my God: away, ye gaudy suitors, away, ye glittering toys, there is no room for you; my whole soul, if its capacity were ten thousand times larger than it is, were too scant to entertain the supreme Good, to let in infinite goodness and fulness. Oh charge it upon yourselves with the greatest vehemence! Love the Lord, O my soul, keep thyself in the love of God; let the love of God constrain you, and keep yourselves under the most powerful constraints of it. In a word, live upon God as upon uncreated life itself, drink at the fountain, feed upon infinite fulness, depend upon almighty power, refer yourselves to unsearchable wisdom, and unbounded love; see nothing but God in the creature, taste nothing but God in the world, delight yourselves in him, long for communion with him, and communications from him, to receive of his fulness grace for grace. Then do we live most like angels, when we live most purely in God, and find all the powers of our souls spending themselves upon him, and ourselves, our life, and all the comforts of it, flowing from him, and again swallowed up in him. But because we are yet in the body, I shall explain it in these following particulars.

1*st.* "Converse with God in all your self-excellencies." I bade you before not converse with these; now, I say, converse with God in these. Thus do the angels; they know nothing that they have of their own, they enjoy nothing distinct from God: they are excellent creatures, excellent in knowledge, power, holiness, &c. yet they enjoy all their excellencies in God, and ascribe them all to him, *Rev.* vii. 12. and so let us labour to do.

1. View yourselves not in your own particular beings, but in the essence of God; look upon yourselves as being and subsisting in the midst of an infinite essence, in which the whole creation is, as it were, wrapt up, and doth subsist.

Digitized by Google

2. And whatever excellency you find in your souls or bodies, look not upon it as your own; maintain not a *meum* and *tuum*, a distinction of interests between God and yourselves, but look upon all as God's, and enjoy it in him.

3. When you find yourselves tempted to cast a fond and unchaste look upon the beauty, strength, activity, or temper of your own bodies, upon the ingenuity, wisdom, constancy, courage, composedness of your own souls, take heed of settling into a selfish admiration of any of them, but enjoy them in God, and say, This, O my body, this, O my soul, is no other than the portraiture of the blessed God; these created excellencies are broken beams of the infinite, unspotted, uncreated perfections, *Jer.* ix. 23, 24. Having once attained to this, we shall no longer covet to be admired, desire to be commended, fret at being undervalued; I mean, not in a selfish manner, but rather break out in a spiritual passion with the psalmist, *O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!* Ps. cvii 8.

4. Nay, let me add, when you find yourselves ready to put your own stamp upon God's best coin, to look upon supernatural gifts and graces with a sinful selfish admiration, remember that you have them only in Christ Jesus, and enjoy them in your Head; labour to enjoy grace itself only in Christ, as the apostle, *Gal.* ii. 20. *I, yet not I, but Christ in me.* 1 *Cor.* xv. 10. *I labour, yet not I, but the grace of God.* So ought we to glory: I believe, I love, I am patient, penitent, humble; yet not I, but the grace of God that is with me, Christ Jesus that dwelleth in me. And indeed a godly man, who thus lives at the very height of his own being, yea, and above it too, knows best how to reverence himself, yea, and to love himself too, and yet without any self-love; for he loves himself in God, and his own endowments as divine ornaments.

2dly. "Converse with God, and live upon him in the excellencies of all other creatures, and in all your creature-enjoyments." We cannot live without creatures, as the an-

Digitized by Google

gels do indeed, but let us come as near them as we can, which is by living above creatures; place your happiness in God, and your hearts upon him; labour to find God all things to you, and in you, and to be filled with his fulness; labour to get your understandings filled with the knowledge of God, your wills filled with his divine will, your hearts filled with his infinite goodness and sweetness, your memories filled with the remembrance of his name, your whole souls filled with his holy and pure image, filled with the fruits of his Holy Spirit: nay, let these very bodies be filled not only with his good creatures, but more especially with his good-will in the creatures. It is said indeed of the sensual epicures of the world, that their bellies are filled with God's hid treasures, *i. e.* with rare and precious delicacies: but how much better doth God fill the bellies of his saints with his hid treasures, when he feedeth them with his divine favour, and dippeth his hand with them in the dish? This is meat indeed which the saints eat of, which other men, though they feed at the same table, know not of. The glorified saints shall be satisfied wholly and perfectly with the divine image shining gloriously on them, and in them; to which purpose that of the psalmist may be accommodated, *Ps.* xvii. *ult.* *I shall be satisfied when I awake, &c.* Well, we cannot be so satisfied in this life it seems: however, though we cannot be so satisfied with it, yet let us not be satisfied without it, nor satisfied with any thing besides it. Resolve, holy soul, Well, if I must not be fully satisfied with the image of my heavenly Father till I awake, I will lay down, and fall a sleep hungry as I am then; for I will not fill my mouth with chaff, nor my soul with the husks that the swine do eat. But, in the mean time, get what you can of God out of creature-enjoyments.

1. Enjoy all things for God, and that these two ways;

(1.) Use all for him. Those riches honours, interests, friends, which are cloggs upon the heels of others, let them be as heels to you to carry you heaven-ward; let your souls be winged with those very enjoyments, wherewith the

Digitized by Google

wings of others are pinioned; and that which is fuel to their worldly lusts, let it be as fuel to feed and nourish your spiritual love. To use what we have for God, is the only way of not abusing it; this is one way of enjoying all for God, to use all for him: and yet there is something higher in that phrase of enjoying all for God, than this, *viz.*

(2.) Value no creature-comfort any further than as it leads to God; and this in a double sense too. 1. Value things to be good only by this, by their leading you unto God: *Perfectum in suo genere est mensura reliquorum.* Now, God being the supreme and infinite Good, any thing is so far good as it leads to the enjoyment of him. Now, the enjoyment of God is only in being like to him; holiness is his image; so then, every thing is good that tends to sanctification, and to make men partakers of a divine nature. We are usually mistaken in the true notion of good, and evil, of mercies and judgments judging according to the taste, as foolish patients do; but God's thoughts are not as our thoughts. Measure all things by the proportion they bear, and the tendency they have to the supreme Good: and call not any thing evil that brings nearer to him, nor any thing good that draws off from him. 2. When you have found a thing that is really good, tending and leading to the chief Good, and to the possession of him; labour to enjoy it, and rejoice in it only under this notion, as such; when you love it, let it be with a pure spiritual love; and so order your delight in it, that it may be said, you do rather rejoice in the end of it, than in the enjoyment of it.

2. Another way of living upon God in the creature is, to enjoy all things as partaking of him. *Every good and perfect gift is from above,* James i. 16. Every beam of created light floweth out of the Father of light. When the blessed and glorious God framed this stately fabric of the visible world, because there was nothing better in the world than himself, he was pleased to copy out himself in it, and to spread his own infinite perfections over it, and through it, *Rom.* i. 20. so that every particular good is a blossom of

Digitized by Google

the first goodness; every created excellency is a dark draught of God, and a broken beam of this infinite Sun of righteousness. Created life, beauty, wisdom, goodness, sweetness, are nothing else but effluxes, or rather ebullitions out of the self-sufficient Fountain, scant communications made of himself, from uncreated Life, essential Wisdom, universal Goodness; and under this notion we ought only to enjoy them, and delight in them; and if we do so, we do not so much enjoy them, as God in them. Oh labour to do so! look upon the perfections which you find here below, not so much as the perfections of this or that particular being, but as they are so many drops risen out of the Fountain of all perfections, in whom they all meet, and are concentered. It is well expressed by one, "In a particular being, love the universal Goodness," let the whole world be as the garden of God to you, where every creature is a flower, from which you may suck something of the divine sweetness, Alas! at what a low and sensual rate do we live, when we rejoice in creatures, either as they are excellent, or as they are ours? whereas indeed neither of these is true; for they are not excellent, but God is excellent in them; and how can we call any thing our own, when God made both us and all things for himself? Oh! how injurious is it to the blessed God when we rob him of his own perfections that he hath imprinted upon the creature, by loving it, and delighting in it, not as in him, but as something distinct from him! nay, we are then injurious to ourselves, as we shall see by and by. Labour to enjoy and to converse with God in the creatures, *O how precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God!* cried David, when he had been meditating of the creature's excellencies, Ps. cxxxix. 17. Labour to abstract your minds from terrene things even in the enjoyment of them, and call upon yourselves to love, and live, and feed upon God in them; live not upon the dark side of your mercies, but upon the representations of God in them. Is there any thing good? oh, this is a taste of infinite goodness! Is there any thing sweet? oh,

Digitized by Google

how sweet is the God that made it so! Is there any thing lovely? is it a picture of him whose name is Love. Is any thing firm, stable, lasting? It is a shadow of that glorious Essence with whom there is no shadow of change. Have you any thing strong? it arises out of that God with whom is everlasting strength. Doth any creature give rest, ease, refreshment? it springs out of the all satisfying fulness of God. In a word, labour to climb up by every created excellency, as by so many beams, to the Father of lights: let all the world be to you as God's temple, and be ready to say of every place, as Jacob, *How dreadful is this place! surely this is none other but the house of God*; that God who runs through all created beings, and from himself derives several prints of beauty and excellency all the world over. But especially take heed of your own created comforts, that they do not insensibly lead away your hearts, and ensnare you into a sinful, particular, distinct love of them; which is a sin soon committed, hardly discerned, and most hardly reformed. If any be freed from these inordinate affections, sure they are but few; and those few have come dearly by it; as one said in another case, With a great sum they have obtained this freedom; they have paid for it, not with the foreskins of the Philistines, but with the lives of what they so loved, there being no way to cure this evil distemper, but cutting off the member affected with it, the part that it fed upon. As a branch of this head, let me add, Labour to live upon God in the excellencies of other men: value them, and all their accomplishments, only in God, as he that did *diligere Deum habitantem in Augustino*, admire God, and enjoy them in God. Wherever you see wisdom, goodness, ingenuity, holiness, justice, or any other accomplishment, say, here and there is God. And this the honest way of making ourselves masters of whatever is another man's, and enjoying it, as truly as he himself doth, yea, as truly as if it were our own; when we behold all these beams, as coming from the same Fountain of lights, and do love them all in him, with an universal

Digitized by Google

love. This is the rare art of having nothing, yet possessing all things; of being rich, though one have nothing; and of being wise, though one have nothing.

3. The last way of living upon God in the creature is, to taste and feed upon the love of God in them, not only his common bounty, but his special love in Christ. The good-will of God gives a sweet relish to every morsel, as I hinted before. Even in the midst of all your delightful pleasant, sweet enjoyments, let your souls be more affected with this than with them; let this be as the manna lying upon the top of all your outward comforts, which your spirits may gather up and feed upon. But this I touched upon before, therefore I shall add no more concerning it. Thus I have shewn you how you may imitate the life of angels, in living upon God, even whilst you live in the body. To this I may add another particular or two.

3dly. "Converse with God, and live upon him in all his ordinances." Let communion with God be your drift in every duty, and the very life, and soul, and sweetness of every ordinance. You never read of a soul more thirsty after ordinances than David, as might appear abundantly; yet if you look well into the expressions, you will find, that it was not so much after them, as after God in them; not after the dead letter, but after the living God; *Ps.* xlii. 2. *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God;* and *Ps.* lxxxiv. 2. *My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.* Let the word preached or read be as a voice from heaven talking with you; let your conference be a comment upon that word; let meditation be as a kind of bringing down God into your souls, and prayer as a raising up of your souls into God, nothing but faith and love put into praises. And so of all the rest.

4thly. Converse with God in all his providences." prosperity, adversity, plenty, penury, health, sickness, peace, and perplexity. This is a large theme: but as to prosperity, I have spoken something already, under that head of conversing with God in creature-enjoyments; as for adver-

Digitized by Google

sity, I have said much more in a large discourse to describe and commend the art of conversing with God in afflictions. Briefly at this time, converse not with losses, wants, afflictions, but with God in them; and that not only with the justice, righteousness, severity, and sovereignty of God in them, but with the goodness and mercy of God in them. They are dark providences, we had not need to dwell altogether on the dark side of them. If all the ways of the Lord towards his people be mercy and truth, *Ps.* xxv. 10. then his rougheth and most dark ways are so too: if God be wholly love, 1 *John* iv. 8. then his very corrections proceed not from hatred: if it be his name to be goods and to do good, *Ps.* cxix. 68. where have we learned then to call his afflicting providences evils, and to divide evil, which is but one, even as God is one, into *culpæ* and *pœnæ*, sin and affliction? Surely we speak as men; and if God call them so, he speaks after the manner of men, as he often doth. If the governing will of God be pure, perfect, and infinitely good and righteous, ought we not to converse with it in a free and cheerful manner, yea, and to love it too? In a word, pore not upon creature-changes, nor the uncertain wheels of motion, that are turning up and down we know not how, nor how oft; but fix yourselves upon that all seeing Eye, that unbounded Understanding, that unsearchable and infinite Goodness, that derives itself through the whole universe, and sits in all the wheels of motion, governing all the strange motions of the creatures in a wonderful and powerful manner, and carrying them all in their several orbs to one last and blessed end.

Thus imitate the angelical life, even whilst you are in the body: converse with God in self-excellencies, in the creature-excellencies, ordinances, providencies; and yet labour to be more like him still, to abstract your mind from all these, and material and sensible things, and to converse with God without the help of any creature, I mean in the Spirit, and by a secret feeling of his almighty goodness, and energy of grace, and the communications of a divine

Digitized by Google

life in your souls. In a word, if you would taste of heaven whilst you are upon earth, labour above all things for a true conjunction of your hearts with God, in a secret feeling of his goodness, and a reciprocation of love to him; and to find the holy and blessed God exercising his grace and power upon all the faculties of your souls, and rendering them like unto himself, and all these powers of the soul mutually spending themselves upon him freely and entirely, as upon the chiefest Good, which is their proper and full object. Seeing the saints in glory shall be like unto the angels of God in their way of living in and upon God alone, receive, I pray, this exhortation, which I have so largely prosecuted, and labour to begin that life, as far as you can, upon earth. Is there not reason for such an inference? doth it not now flow naturally from the doctrine? If you think it do not, I will add two or three particulars to strengthen this inference, or at least to clear it.

1. It is highly reasonable that we begin to be that which we expect to be for ever, to learn that way of living in which we hope to live to all eternity: so that I infer, upon as strong ground as the apostle, 1 *John* iii. 3. *He that hath this hope purified himself, &c.*

2. If this be the life of angels, then it is the highest and noblest life that any created being is capable of. As by the bread of angels, and the tongue of angels, the most excellent food, and the most excellent language is understood in scripture, so much we understand this life of angels. Now, it is very suitable to the reasonable soul, that immortal, noble being, to aim at the highest and noblest life: see *Mat.* xvi. 26. *What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

3. This shall not only be our life in heaven, but itself is something of heaven, a beginning of heaven. This life is not a thing really distinct from life eternal, *John* xvii. 3. *This is life eternal, &c.* 1 *John* v. 13. *Ye have eternal life.* Therefore we read of eternal life abiding in men, not abiding in them, 1 *John* iii. 15. so also *John* vi 54. *Whoso eateth my flesh*

Digitized by Google

hath eternal life. A holy soul thus deified, thus living in and upon God, is as truly glorified upon earth, in some degree, as the world is enlightened by the morning-sun, which is as truly, though not so gloriously, as by the sun in its greatest height. Oh low and ignoble spirits, who can be satisfied with a happiness which shall only be in the world to come! Certainly it is true and proper speech to say, that a participation of God, is an anticipation of heaven; and to be like unto him, is to be with him. You see what reason I have to make such an inference, and to form it unto such an earnest exhortation; oh, therefore, I beseech you before God, and his holy angels, to endeavour to be like him, and to live like them!

Obj. Say not, How can men on earth live like angels? *Ans.* 1. But fall on and imitate them, though it be—*haud passibus æquis:* 2. We are bidden to live the life of God. *Mat.* v. *ult. Be perfect, &c,* so 1 *Pet.* i. 15. *Be ye holy, &c.* If I speak high, how high speak these texts.

Obj. Saying not, But how can this animal life permit this? *Ans.* 1. Thus men have lived in the body; thus lived Enoch, *Gen.* v. 22. thus lived Paul, *Phil.* i. 21. thus lived David, that man after God's own heart, (the greatest and most divine character that can be given of a mortal man), *Ps.* lxxiii. 25. *There is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.* 2. Cannot we live in the body, except we live to the body? You see saints upon earth live above other men upon earth; and yet a little more pains, take the other flight, and you may live above yourselves too, higher than you do. I will only add a motive or two to this duty of living upon God.

1. "The last enemy to be overcome is creature-love." This is the last enemy that keeps the field, by which alone the greatest sort of men do perish everlastingly: beat down this, and you win the day, and shall wear the crown; nay, the very conquest of it is a crown, as I said before.

2. "To live upon God in the creature, is to enjoy the creature in the best sense." You will lose nothing of the

Digitized by Google

creature by this means, but shall enjoy it more fully than ever you did: for the creature is ten thousand times sweeter in God than it is in itself. Yea, in a word, this is the way to enjoy all the world, and to enjoy the accomplishments of all men, and all things, as much as if they were your own.

3. "It is the way never to lose any thing." He that lives upon God, spends upon a stock that cannot be wasted, drinks at a fountain that cannot be exhausted. So much as we enjoy of God in the creature, we do not lose with it; and that which we do not so enjoy, we deserve to lose. This then is the secure and honourable life, in comparison of which the life of a prince is but a wallowing in the mire. "Lord, give us evermore this bread," and hearts to feed upon it. Amen.

Digitized by Google

GOD AND THE SOUL;

A PARAPHRASE UPON

1 John v. 16.—*Dwelleth in God, and God in him.*

MY God is all things unto me;
All God is also mine:
I am, O Lord, wholly in thee;
And also wholly thine.

God is all things unto me.

The powers of each created good
In God are all contain'd;
In him my comforts all do bud,
Flourish and are maintain'd.

All God is mine.

He gave me all that he had made;
All which did not suffice
My larger soul; therefore I pray'd,
He gave himself likewise.

I am wholly in God.

I'th' midst of God I live and breathe,
In him I'm only bright;
The rays with which I shine beneath
Are borrow'd from his light.

I am wholly God's.

O Lord, I'm not at all mine own,
Nor for another free:
Let life be a reflection
Of beams receiv'd from thee.

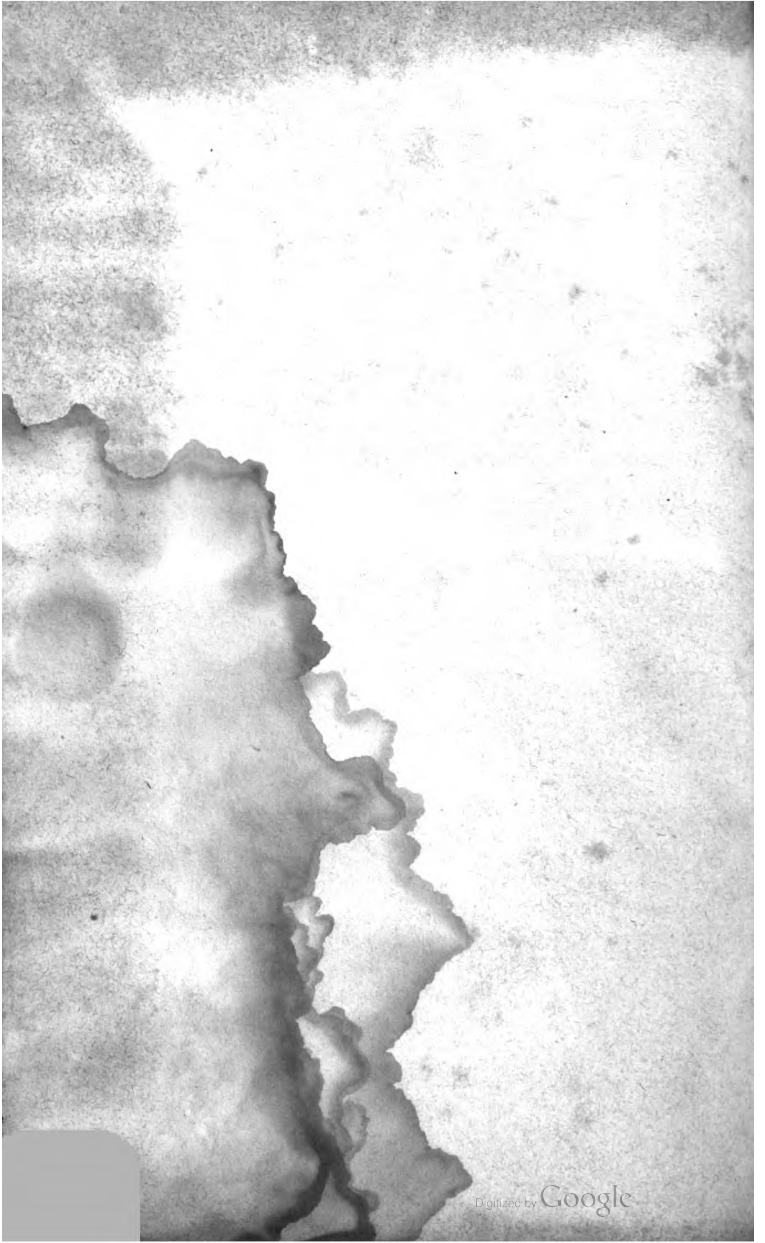
All things below thee, Lord, I judge
To be below my soul;
O let my nobler mind ev'n grudge,
Itself in dust to roll.

Be more myself, O God, to me
Than I myself have been;
Make me, O God, more one with thee
Than with myself! Amen.

G. Wilson, Printer, Leeds.

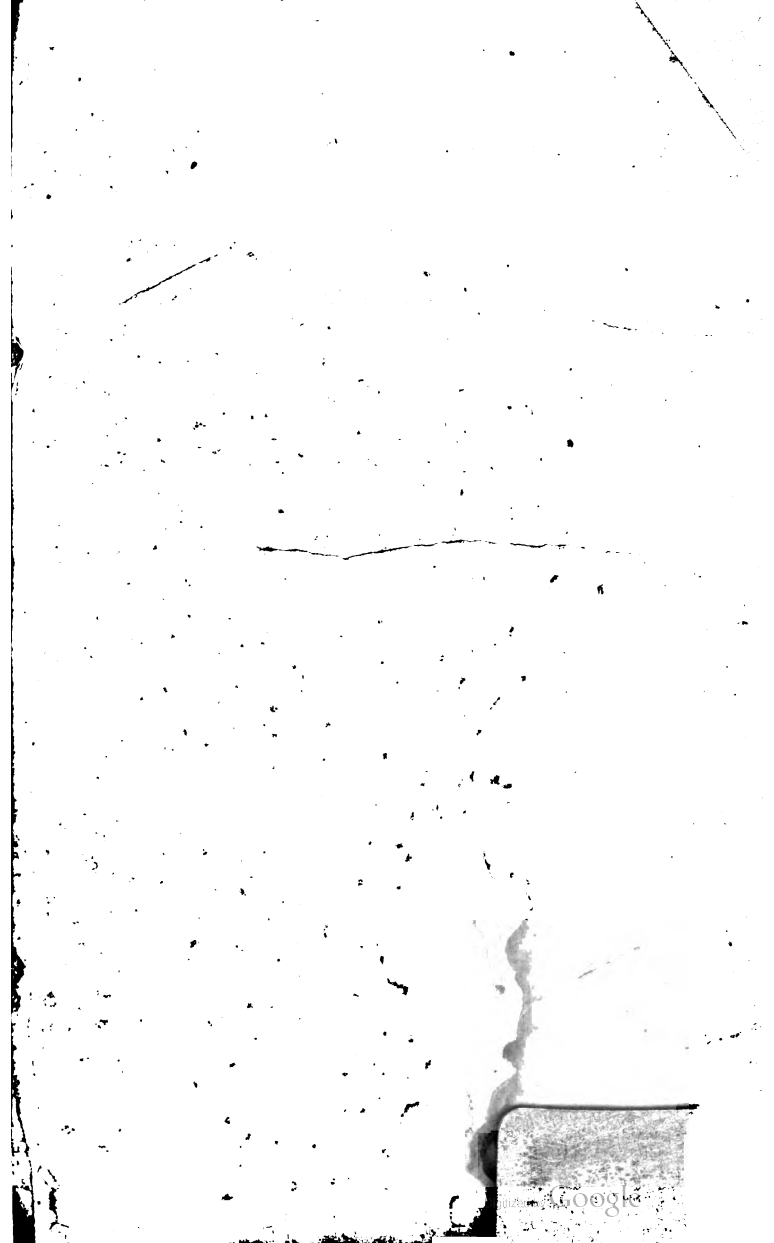
Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google


Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google